

# FOLLY

BY EDITH RICKERT



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1906

# Folly

By  
EDITH RICKERT

*Author of "The Reaper"*

*With Frontispiece by*  
SIGISMOND DE IVANOWSKI



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BOOK I.

THE HOUSE OF TEMPTATION.

“Strong-built the house with walls of love,  
But the perilous siege is strong.

Ho! a cry below, a cry above:

“The gates will hold—how long?”

J. HALDANE GORE, *The Watch Tower*.

## Book I.

# THE HOUSE OF TEMPTATION.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE NEW FOLLY.

NEAR four of the clock on a gay April afternoon, at Sunlands, her Surrey home, Folly came downstairs for the first time after her illness. Bronzino would have been the man to paint her, some three centuries earlier; he would have done justice to the proud uplift of the head, the noble curve of the broad shoulders, the ample sweep of limb, as she descended slowly, but with a firm step and unwavering. I do not know whether he would have chosen to show her poised under the rose-window of ancient glass, with its ambers illuminating the amber of her hair, its royal blues empurpling her golden-hued dress, and its crimsons staining the steps below; or whether he would have portrayed her leaning over the balustrade of the great staircase where it swings out into the hall, her hands upon the carven imps and dragons of the handrail, her eyes, with the look of see-

## Folly

ing a thing new and strange, upon the dusky Madonna over the fireplace below.

There she hung, like any Juliet from her balcony, but did not perceive her husband at the foot of the stairs until he tossed a tiny bunch of celandines against her cheek.

She caught the posy and glanced down upon him calmly and critically. She might well have been thinking that, burly and ruddy as he was, he made no bad figure of a country squire; but he grew uncomfortably aware that he was hot and mud-splashed and entirely out of harmony with her daintiness.

She tossed back his flowers with the comment: "They don't match my gown—see?"

In silence he returned the despised blossoms to his buttonhole, as she asked indifferently: "Roads bad?"

He nodded: "I'd have made a bee-line cross-country if I'd known you were coming down. Hey, there—want an arm?" He thought for a moment that she was dizzy.

"Not I. I'm doing this myself, thank you."

"Come along, then; there's a draught here," he urged.

"Presently. . . . Well?"

Her look challenged him to a question, but he could not make out what she wanted.

"Andrew!"—she laughed. "St. Andrew——"

"What's up?" He obviously did not fancy the canonization.



## Folly

“I’ve such a shock for you. I’m not the same woman I was last month—or even last week—or yesterday. I’m somebody else!”

He grunted: “I could have told you that years ago. You’re somebody else every other day. Come down—away from that window.”

She shrugged. “How do you like my tea-gown?”

“Stunning,” he remarked, without enthusiasm.

“So it is,” she accepted the praise as her due. “I meant it to be. I planned it out the day before baby came; and I decided then to wear it now. Jordan did the rest.”

“Are you coming down?” he persisted.

“Oh, you tiresome grub in tweeds! You would like it as well if it were a red and black checked flannel!”

“I should like you as well,” he admitted.

“You see,” she expounded her canon of art, “it’s the coppery gold of unfolding beech-buds, and you can’t deny that it tones with my hair; while the green is the colour of the young leaves, and I used it in the frills to reflect green into my eyes. If I didn’t dress properly, goodman, people would say I was extraordinary—plain. And they don’t, do they? But we’re getting away from the point.”

“By no means,” said he. “I’m sticking to it. Come down this minute.”

“Sha’n’t! Not till I please!”

In a second he had her by the wrist and was dragging her, half laughing, half resisting, into the drawing-room.

## Folly

"I pleased then," she said, with a sudden flush. "I like you best when you're most disagreeable, Dandie."

When she had arranged herself in an arm-chair before the fire, he stood looking down upon her, and observed politely: "You were about to say——?"

"It would serve you right if I never told you now," she teased him.

But he was not without sense: "I don't know that I'm particularly anxious to hear."

"That's always the way," she said, with a pensive face in her hand. "I tell you I'm made over—a new woman—and you're thinking about the kennels this very minute."

"That charge isn't worth answering. Are you going to explain or not?"

"Shall you be glad or sorry," she fenced, "to find me different?"

"I'll not commit myself yet."

"You'll be glad, I suppose, but you ought to say you'll be sorry. But I should be sorry if you said you'd be glad——"

"Come to the point," said he, but gently enough.

"Well, it's about that boy of yours upstairs"—she did not like being hurried.

"Mine?" he interposed.

"Yes, your son. Oh, if you only had a grain of instinct in understanding women!"

His gentle "I do my best" did not lessen her impatience.

## Folly

“Well, perhaps: but you seem to find it very difficult. Now that baby of yours——”

“Will you tell me why you disclaim all share in him at the present moment?”

“As if it were necessary to do anything else,” said she, with high scorn. “Why, I’m his mother!”

“I see.”

“Oh, no, you don’t; not even remotely. A body has to be plain with you. . . . Well, now, in the beginning, I didn’t know in the least how to take him.”

“Then you can’t expect me to know how to take you,” he retorted, with unexpected briskness.

“I don’t; I never did. But that doesn’t matter. I always hated the sound of the word *matron*——”

“But you braved that half a dozen years ago, when you married me. Isn’t *mother* rather better on the whole?”

“No. It means that one has to be old and responsible.”

He stood with his hands clasped behind him, staring at a fine copy of the “Gran Duca” that hung just over her head, but not unaware of her watching eyes. “I can’t say that I’m disappointed, Florence. I never expected you to like it much, though I hoped you would. But I want to say just a word: jump on me as much as you please; but, for heaven’s sake, don’t take it out of the poor little chap! He’s not to blame.”

“Go on,” she urged, tightening her lips in a curious smile.

## Folly

"I had it on my mind all the while you were upstairs," he continued.

"Naturally, since you knew I'd hate him. What else?"

"Well, I decided——"

"You went so far as to decide?"

"That if you didn't take kindly to him, we'd make sure of the right sort of nurse and pack him off to the mater."

"You did? How good of you! So I needn't be bothered with him at all?"

"That's it."

"And what would the mater think?"

"She? Oh, she'd have no end of fun. She ought to have had twenty kids instead of one poor specimen. She's a right sort, the mater."

"I like your plain truths, Andrew. She's not my sort—eh? Tell me now. I suppose you think I might take a fancy to put him out of the way?"

"I shouldn't wonder." His eyes twinkled, but he was half serious. "You're a reversion to an old type, you know. You ought to have lived when you could set a little war a-going if you felt bored; or poison off a few relations by way of change. You would have had a merry life; and you would have survived to a ripe age and had a fine tomb. You're sadly out of place to-day." He concluded musingly: "I wonder how far you would go—I wonder now."

"And sometimes so do I," she confessed. "But,

## Folly

faith, I never know from one moment to the next what I'm going to do."

"But the boy," he reverted to the point. "They say he's an uncommonly fine——"

"Child," she concluded for him flippantly. "They always are. Did you ever hear of a baby that wasn't? I wonder what becomes of the others? Probably sent to baby farms and killed off. Just as well. If the uncommonly fine ones turn out as badly as they usually do, it's lucky that we're spared the growing up of the others."

"Fireworks," was his brief comment. "The question is, do you want the mater to have him?"

"Have you asked her?" she demanded, with a sudden sparkle in her eyes.

He smiled. "Not yet, naturally."

"Not yet," she repeated. "Well, if you must know—you're always in such a hurry. . . ." She drew him down on her chair-arm, and reached up to stroke his hair; but she had an exasperating trick of letting her hand linger on the little round spot where was no hair at all. "Come, now, I'll tell you. When they first brought him up for me to see, it was on the tip of my tongue to say—you will be shocked!"

"I think I'm immune to shocks by this time, my girl. Go on."

"It wasso like a new kitten. I wanted to say, 'Take it away and drown it,' if only for the fun of seeing nurse's face. But I knew they'd think I was hysterical,

## Folly

so I lay low and remarked only, 'I hope it will grow prettier.' As it was, she said all over the place that I was a heartless woman. But honestly, now, could I have been expected to like it?"

"Women seem to make a point of admiring them," he observed.

"Oh, women——" her shoulders went high—"sheep! But it was a puling, drivelling, lobster-faced squalling thing, with heaps of unnatural black hair that all fell out——"

"What are you coming to?" he demanded.

"Why, this. Of course, I should have done my duty by him, anyway. We'd talked that over before."

"A model child," he groaned.

"But the curious thing was, the very first time I fed him, as soon as his little face lay against my breast—heavens! I'm talking nonsense."

"It's a new sort on your lips, at least," he declared.

"All these weeks the process has been going on; and I didn't fairly know what had happened until I stopped on the stairway to-day and for the first time in my life saw the meaning of that smoky old Madonna of yours. I think——"

"Yes, yes, you think?"

She pushed him away, for he was leaning to her more eagerly than she liked. "If you will know—he isn't such a bad little thing after all!"

"You mean that in time you might come to—like him?"—his voice shook with eagerness.

## Folly

She laughed in the old way. "Why, my dear, I almost think I do!"

Thereupon he was not to be held off any longer; and indeed, she rebelled but little, looking at him with eyes suddenly grown dark and dim and wistful. After a silence she whispered: "I thought you might like to know."

"Miracles do happen," he muttered, more to himself than to her.

"Yes. I should never have believed it of myself. But he was so helpless, and he's growing pretty, too—however, we needn't go into that. The mischief's done."

"Thank heaven! And what next?"

"Ah, that's the point. How can I ever live up to it—him, I mean. Poor Folly! You have spoiled me, you and the mater, with that silly pet name. I suppose now I must be wise and good; and it will be precious hard work."

"So I may look upon you as converted?"—he put the matter lightly.

"On the Penitent Form," said she, in all humility; then hid her face against his arm. "You will help me to be good?"

"Dandie Junior will do that," he answered gently; but he wondered, as he had wondered a thousand times before, what meaning lay hidden beneath her words.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LITTLE LOVER.

SUNLANDS lies half way up the southern slope of Cunsden Hill, with a great fir wood at its back stretching as far as the Common; and in front, park lands, not overburdened with trees, rolling down to the river Leigh. The house is low and plain, of a dull stone vivified by an abundance of fine and luxuriant creeper—the kind of house that you would suspect and in this case, rightly—of being set out with Sheraton and Chippendale, with Lowestoft and old Crown Derby, with a family portrait gallery, a secret chamber, and a ghost.

And yet no part of it is older than the days of Queen Anne; for it was in the reign of that monarch that the first Andrew Christie, commander of the frigate *Rupert*, rescued a valuable cargo of bohea from Malay pirates off Singapore, and for this and equally signal services in the American colonies was rewarded with a fat piece of Surrey. To this he added by purchase, and, it is said, other devices, until in the present day his descendant in the eighth generation owns all



## Folly

that he can see from any window of his house, in farms and in forest-land, in pasture and in common, together with three villages, six hamlets, and the fishing of the Leigh from its source to its junction with the Eden.

The garden is walled off from the park to surround pretty well three sides of the house; and of this the eastern corner is laid out in formal Dutch fashion, modelled after the tiny enclosed square at Hampton Court, likewise beginning with clipped arbours, and falling away by terraces of grass and quaintly-shaped flower-beds, down to the circular fish-pond set out with stiff dwarf cypresses and trimmed yews.

Late in April, this fish-pond was rimmed deep with yellow jonquils. One golden morning, Folly, not content with the great sheaf of them that she carried, was stooping for more, when—suddenly troubled with a sense of being observed—she rose and turned to meet the eyes of the man whom she had familiarly called her “Little Poet,” and rarely—in jest, be it understood—her “Little Lover.”

There was a sudden rain of jonquils, and a great ado collecting the scattered blossoms before the proper greetings could be exchanged.

“Oh, to be in England  
Now that April’s there,”

was his answer to her challenge: “Where did you drop from?”

“Did you come for that?” she wished to know.

“Isn’t that enough? Politely, I came to see you

## Folly

gathering jonquils; honestly, I had some business to arrange.”

“Will you come in?” she asked, with formal courtesy.

“It would be much pleasanter to walk up and down in this arbour. I’ll quote you spring verses and love verses——”

“I’ve heard all you know, I think,” she interrupted brusquely.

“There you’re wrong. I’ve written a few and learned many—some that you wouldn’t understand any more than you appreciate that exquisite old Madonna in your hall.”

“Ah, one learns,” said she, with a sudden sweet smile that passed as quickly as it came. “I think we’ll go in, however.”

At the porch she paused and turned to him with earnest eyes and lips parted for speech, but he was too quick for her as he smiled and quoted:

*“O quanta siete cara agli occhi miei!”*

She blushed painfully. “You must drop all that sort of thing now. Come in and talk to me of art—Italy—gossip—scandal—anything you like but that.”

He said nothing as he lounged upon the window-seat and looked out upon a peculiarly brazen, flaunting tulip-bed. For a little while she posed in an antique carved chair that emphasized her grace of outline; but presently she began to fidget, and sighed very gently. Still he spoke no word. At last she was driven to demand: “Are you never going to say anything?”

## Folly

"I was waiting for my cue, Folly," said he.

"Not Folly." She was amazingly prim.

He lifted one eyebrow. "Florence?"

"Nor that."

"What am I to call you, then?"

She shrugged.

"Mrs. Christie, may I ask, is your husband at home?"

"In Scotland. Do you want to see him?"

It was his turn to shrug: "I shall be quite as pleased to see him as he to see me. But something's come over you, or I'm greatly mistaken."

She smiled at him out of the corners of her eyes.

"Demure isn't the word—you're a perfect pussycat. I don't know you. When did I see you last? You have changed."

"It's nearly a year," said she. "Much can happen in a year."

"Ah, true," he granted, and turned his face quite away from her. She had to repeat her next question twice before he heard: "Am I prettier?"

"Prettier? You never were pretty, not even at your best, as you know very well; but you've still the old smile that would turn the head of the devil himself."

For a moment she seemed content; then asked with hurried irrelevance, "What brought you back?"

"I thought you didn't want to know?"

"Well, I do now—I mean—you are so uninteresting, and one must make conversation."

## Folly

"I'll tell you presently," said he, and turned again to the tulip-bed, apparently unaware that she was studying his face.

Indeed, she was thinking that he too had changed; but she could not see how. Perhaps the long, sharp profile was a trifle sharper, and the square chin a trifle more hard set; but the eyes were as penetrating as ever, as she felt when he again turned to meet her glance.

"There were four abominable blank white walls in my cell," he began.

"Cell?"

"Yes. I've been living at a *certosa*, you see—a little broken-down monastery in the wilderness of the southern Alps. You wouldn't know the *vicolo* even by name. A dozen lean monks, down at heels, sullen——"

She moved restlessly, and he hurried to the point: "You came there every night, you know, and frescoed those white walls."

"No, faith, I didn't!" She was indignant, but she laughed a little too.

"Why, sure you did!"—he retained certain tricks of speech from an Irish mother. "And weren't you out of place just? You would have been *anathema*—is that it?—if those surly fellows had suspected you. I used to chuckle sometimes to think how their shaven polls would have bristled to see what I saw, when I sat in their cloister with the *City of God* on my knees."

He passed his hand across his forehead and turned to

## Folly

the tulips again. She said nothing, but tightened her lips as one that wishes to speak and will not.

“I was trying to work at your poem—you know—but I couldn’t get on with it. I can’t say when you will have it now.”

She frowned in a puzzled way, and studied him in silence.

“No matter for that. But as to your coming there—I suppose I had reckoned unduly upon my virtue in departing last summer, as soon as you said—no, I am not going back to the forbidden subject. I thought I had earned the right to be rid of you; and I tried to forget you—no doubt about it. I wanted my peace of mind again. I thought it would be a brilliant idea to chain you up in verse—see? But you broke loose, night after night, and tormented me like—well, like a devil of the good old-fashioned sort.”

“I don’t in the least know what you mean,” she insisted coldly.

“I daresay not. Why, you came in every conceivable form and guise, but Folly always—always Folly—and you made those walls blaze! Kind of you, wasn’t it? To come wasting the time of a sensible man, and one that might have been a poet, if . . .”

He stopped abruptly and clasped his knee, with the look of one who has just saved himself from saying too much.

She could speak now: “‘Might have been? If?’ What do you mean?”

## Folly

He laughed rather harshly: "I'm a long time coming to the point; but it isn't easy to get it out. You must be patient."

Either his words or his look touched her into sudden anxiety. She crossed over to the window seat and leaned forward pleadingly: "Haldane?"

"Now who's forgetting?" His tone was light again. "I thought you had given up old names for old friends?"

"No matter. Tell me, Haldane. What has gone wrong with you? Have I done——?"

"Nonsense!"

"If you had never known me——?"

"I should have missed the best thing I've had in my life. Don't talk bosh."

"Had?" she repeated, with her puzzled frown.

"You put it all into the past, last summer, didn't you?" And she could make no denial.

"But if I have hurt you in any way——?"

"Not you, my—not you, I assure you. Some people call it Providence, some Chance, some Fate—the woman with the shears that does the mischief. I incline to believe it's sheer bad luck myself; but it's possibly all my own fault—when you come to sift the matter."

"Oh, you talk in riddles," she said sorrowfully.

"Then maybe I got the trick from you; but I'm coming out somewhere. I told you to have patience. The ways you came to me! Never twice the same, of course; a different Folly every day and only a mild sisterly resemblance among them all. The first time, you were

## Folly

in sea-green, with corals and slimy tangle in your hair; and I thought it was Undine until I saw your face. You didn't fit the part somehow. You must never go in for tragedy, you know; you couldn't rise above melodrama. You'd make up best for comic opera. However, I adored you, anyway. Of course, I adore you all the time, only you won't believe it. . . ."

He paused for breath, and she wondered at him in silence. Never before had she heard him so light, so flippant, so disconnected."

"I don't often give way to it, that's why. What was I saying? Oh, yes, another time, you had on that hideous scaly iridescent snaky thing I've seen you wear in town—detestable! Always reminds me of the serpent in Paradise—makes me feel like Adam. I call it a singular lapse from good taste on your part."

He waited for protest, and, as none came, added: "You are more silent to-day than I have ever before known you to be."

She in turn gazed out at the tulip-bed and had no answer ready; but she was thinking: "And you talk more."

"But when you came to the *certosa* in it, and put your arms about my neck——"

"Don't speak that way," she broke in sharply.

"But you did—sure! Soft and warm and strong—strong enough to strangle me if you had liked. . . ."

"No wonder you can write love poetry!"—she tried to be scornful.

## Folly

“With such experiences? No wonder.” But she had not meant that.

“You did more. You laid your face against mine—”

“Please, Hal!”

“A little thinner than it was when I had seen it last, and wet with tears. . . . You don’t often weep, do you?”

“I shall leave you if you don’t stop.”

“It was all gospel truth to me. I suppose it must have been illusion, since you deny it. But did you never think of me in that way then?”

“I may have had foolish thoughts sometimes, but I never—never—unless it was in my dreams and against my will. . . .”

“It was all against your will, Folly,” he said quickly, “and mine too, for that matter. One of the last times, you were like a Greek girl, Nausicaa or somebody, with your hair shining and slipping through your fingers, and your eyes gleaming and tempting and luring. . . . It was then I swore I’d have you, if nothing else in this blessed world!”

“A dangerous vow,” she said softly. “You did not know what you had to reckon with. But why ‘nothing else’? You have had much; you’ll have more. You talk so strangely to-day.”

“So you’re still interested in my career, are you? I believe that was the way you softened the blow to me last summer? You said you would be always—remember? So I’m talking strangely, am I? It seems to me



## Folly

it's yourself that is strangely suspicious. It's as if you had an instinct. . . .”

“I generally have—when there's something wrong,” she said, looking away from him into the room. “But you told me to be patient.”

“A little longer. I don't remember when it was that I cried out in my sleep and roused Fra Antonio from his vigils; but I know he gave me a drink that exorcised you; and in the end they said I'd been having fever. A simple explanation—eh? When I recovered, I thought I had said good-bye to Folly for ever and a day; but one evening in the cloister—the monks were at vespers—you came masquerading as a nun, and persuaded me—I don't quite know how—that you had forgotten me altogether.”

“And so I had.”

“Well—well. I got away to Milan as soon as I could—there was another reason, as you shall hear presently. And then I came to England. Yesterday” . . . he shrugged or shivered, she could not tell which. “To-day I am here.”

“And to-morrow?”

“That depends”—he smiled at her. “You say you had forgotten, but I want you to answer a plain question. Did you ever—from the time I went away until now—wish me back?”

“Did I ever . . .?” she paled a little; but he did not see this, for he was staring at the tulips again, and indeed seemed to have forgotten his question until she in turn asked, “Why?”

## Folly

‘Why? Because I fancied you did—that’s the worst of cultivating the imagination; and twenty times I was on the point of coming over to see whether it was so.’

“But I forbade you,” she said, with something of sternness. “Last summer we drifted quite far enough, and—and since then—I have been all right. How could I have been otherwise—with my husband?”

“That’s not for me to say. I suppose my second thought was nearer the truth then, when I reasoned that it was your vanity I had touched, not your heart. And yet, if I believed that, I should not be here now.”

“You must believe it,” she said hurriedly. “Do you remember the day we parted last summer?”

“Those things are not soon forgotten,” he answered, with a tinge of bitterness.

“Tell me what I said.”

“You said a lot; but the point of it all seemed to be that while you had not broken your vows to your husband, neither had you kept them—that in future he should be the barrier between us.”

“Ah, that was it; and it was true. And I think it is all right. You have not told me what you came for; but—have you heard nothing about me lately?”

“Nothing. Why?”

“Not in town?”

“I haven’t seen anybody you know, I think.”

“There is news.”

“Well?”

He waited; but, after a pause, she said only: “You’d better tell me what you came for.”

## Folly

“No, not now; it needs more consideration. What’s your news?” he persisted.

“I’d rather show you,” she declared.

“Your news?”

“Yes.”

She smiled as she said, brushing back her fine light hair: “Look at me well, Haldane. It’s the last time you’ll ever see the *me* you put into your verses.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, following her as she rose to go. “Are you mad?”

“No,”—she smiled at him over her shoulder—“only changed, as you have already observed.”

He seized her hands then: “Folly, there’s something I want to—I must——”

“Don’t make love to me,” she protested, and repented of the words before they were fairly out, for she saw that she had misread his intention.

“Not yet. I’ll wait a bit.” He dropped her hands and turned away. “I must think a little longer. Show me your news, then.”

At the door she turned to face him, with one hand on each post and her most whimsical expression; but for a second his look checked her utterance. She had known, of course, that he would be watching her—all men did—but instead of passionate admiration, she encountered an unseeing stare that went through her—to what? Still, she recovered herself sufficiently to toss him a butterfly kiss on her finger-tips and to chant teasingly: “It’s good-bye to Folly, you know, good-bye to Folly!”

## Folly

She was not pleased when she found herself a prisoner; and she blocked her ears in vain to the angry voice that stormed and threatened: "You go too far. I've never kissed you yet; but I will. What do you mean? Tell me."

In self-defence she said demurely: "I expect Andrew every minute."

"What the devil——!" He would have kissed her then, but she, daring him to the last moment, said: "You should have been like this a year ago. I'm dead to you now."

Before he was aware that his grasp had loosened she had slipped away. Once free, she let her laugh float down the stairway, and the teasing chant: "Good-bye to Folly! Good-bye to Folly!"

## CHAPTER III.

### WHY HE CAME.

THE baby objected to having his invisible hair brushed, and howled with tears. The nurse would have yielded the point, but the mother was inflexible, on grounds of discipline, as she took care to explain. Further, she declined to take him downstairs until the creases had disappeared and his face was again its normal pink. Even then she loitered from window to window of the pretty blue room, and strayed along the frescoed rhymes, which she herself had painted in quaint procession round the four walls, to make the nursery an abode fit for a baby king. It was only when she perceived the nurse staring in plain wonder at her delay that she finally held out her arms for the child. Hence, some time had elapsed before she slowly descended the great stairway, playing at the pretty game of catch-and-kiss with the tiny fist that flapped sometimes against her cheek and sometimes in the air.

She felt, rather than saw, that somebody was waiting at the foot of the steps; and had held out the baby with her sweetest smile before she perceived that it was her husband, not her guest.

## Folly

His look of pleased surprise altered upon her abrupt: "How funny! I thought you were Haldane Gore. I was just bringing the boy down to show him."

"Gore?" he repeated slowly. "I thought he was abroad?"

"He turned up here an hour ago."

She was busying herself with the baby's frills when Christie said: "Where's my welcome?"

"Chin-chin," she retorted gaily, tilting up her face so that he might kiss it if he pleased. "You haven't been so long away that I need be extravagantly glad, need I?"

"Not at all—polite merely," said he, feigning not to have seen the offered privilege, as he opened the drawing-room door.

Gore rather prided himself on the quickness of his self-control; but it was sorely tried that morning, when he turned to meet Folly with a passionate phrase on his lips, and found her doubly entrenched behind a stiff-looking husband and an elaborately-attired infant.

He smiled afterward, remembering his own coolness, quite sure that he had shown no trace of embarrassment, as he shook hands with Christie and said what he considered the proper things about the snub-nosed full-moon of babyhood.

Folly looked displeased when he observed: "Rather like you in the features, isn't it? What do you call it?"

## Folly

"He is Andrew Junior, of course," she answered with dignity.

And Christie broke into a sudden twinkle, adding: "It's a pity you didn't return in time to stand sponsor at his baptism."

"Thanks, I couldn't have done it. I shouldn't know how. Doesn't one have to promise that he won't fall into sin or something? I couldn't have undertaken it, especially"—he was about to add, but stopped in time—"considering who is his mother."

Christie looked at him oddly, but could scarcely have gathered his mental self-admonition: "If you must be a fool, H. G., don't be a dam-fool."

Folly did not hear all this, as she was turning her charge over to the nurse; but she came up as Christie said: "You'll be stopping with us some time?"

"Thanks, no. I have an engagement in town to-night."

"Not to dinner?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Sorry. See you at luncheon, then."

He had turned away when Gore said slowly: "I think I must return by the next train. I had only an hour or two to spare. Going abroad again at the end of the week."

Christie made a gesture of polite regret: "Afraid I must leave you anyway. There's a man of mine been waiting to see me all morning. No doubt Mrs. Christie

## Folly

will . . . ” There followed a proper exchange of civilities and adieus.

When the two were again alone, she faced him with a quick: “So you’re going?”

“Yes.”

“And you haven’t told me——”

“I’m knocked out, you see—bowled over by a six-weeks-old—is it?—youngster.”

“What has he to do with it?” she demanded.

“Why—in short—everything,” he laughed. “But I’m glad I came, for several reasons. It’s just as well to know that you don’t care a rap about me.”

“Do you think,” she asked slowly, “that I ever did?”

“I don’t know. Perhaps not. You thought so once. So did I. But it will be easier now to know that you don’t.” He laughed suddenly: “I suppose it can’t do any harm, as things are, to tell you what I came down for. It may amuse you: it was only to ask you to throw up the sponge, and”——

“And——?”

“And come away with me.”

She bit her underlip: “Why? What claim have you——?”

“Ah, that’s the point. I thought—after much thinking—that if you still cared, perhaps I had a sufficient claim. But there’s the boy. And you don’t care.” He began to walk about the room, picking up things and setting them down again, all the while intoning a



## Folly

foolish little song that he had made long ago and she had once said she hated. It begins:

“When I was young and went to war—”

“I know there’s a strange reason—a good reason,” she said, under her breath.

He paused and looked straight at her, but answered only in the words of the song:

“Now I am old and cracked and—”

“Don’t sing that nonsense,” she interrupted irritably.

“Well, then”—he continued his roving—“how do you like this?”

““I had a wife in Middelburg,  
And one I had in Dene;  
But when they asked me—””

“Oh, that’s worse!”

“Well, what did they ask me? The answer is:

““I could not choose between.””

“Oh, Hal, Hal!”—there were tears in her eyes.

“My dear girl, I’m trying to tell you something without using plain English. And first it’s one way and then another; but they all fail. You are blind. I must be going.”

With her hands clasped across her knees, she looked at him: “I know it’s terrible. And I’d rather have it from you than from anyone else.”

“There’s reason in that, perhaps”—he paused be-

## Folly

fore her. "But I was a cad to mention the matter at all. Of course, I didn't understand then how things are. You'll have to know sometime. It can't make much difference to you."

"Tell me," she pleaded.

"Here goes, then. I'm sentenced, that's all." He laughed and resumed his pacing.

Her face showed that she did not understand.

"Don't you see what I mean? We all die sooner or later; but I've the luck of knowing my limit. I came back to England especially to find out."

"What is—your limit?" she asked, scarcely above a whisper.

"A year, more or less. Now do you see?"

"Who said so?"

"Gregory. The other chaps wouldn't commit themselves."

"Were there—many—doctors?"

"A whole hive buzzing about me. That was Greg's doing, too. But they pretty well agreed, I think, that the game is nearly up and there's nothing to do. Do you see now why I wanted you? Abominably selfish of me to come, wasn't it? But it doesn't matter now. 'I had a wife——'"

"Ah, stop! They didn't tell you that—it is hopeless?"

He stood before her again. "I can't say. I knew a chap once, an old sailor—had the same thing. He was cheerful—called it a bad throat, and was always ex-

## Folly

pecting to get the better of it; but it did for him. It upsets you to hear about such things, doesn't it? I'm a brute. I'll be off. Don't worry."

"They may be wrong—I mean the doctors," she said quietly, after a pause.

"Sure. But Greg's pretty thorough, as a rule."

She rose, crossed over to the fireplace and leaned her elbows on the mantel, with her face in her hands, staring at the clock. "You spoke of a particular train?"

"Yes. I can do it easily. No, thanks, I'd rather walk. Well—good-bye—for the present."

They shook hands, casually it seemed; but his thin hot fingers gripped hard hers that were passive and cold.

"I shall hope for better news of you," she said, not lifting her eyes.

"You are very good," he answered, with a touch of irony.

"You will let me hear? I shall expect to hear," she continued, in the same restrained voice. "And you will leave nothing undone? It is a duty. . . . And there's always the chance. . . ."

"Of discovering the bacillus? Sure. Only he's been discovered rather often before."

"I——" there speech failed her altogether.

"I'd no business to come thrusting my penny troubles on you, you know. It would have been different if you had cared. Don't waste another thought on me. I'm mortal glad you have the little chap."

## Folly

She did not realize that he had gone until she found herself staring at the closed door, and wondering that the room whirled and grew dark about her. It was absurd that she who almost never fainted. . . . Through the gathering dimness there shot before her mind a strangely clear memory of Haldane and herself, walking through the woods, just before she had sent him away. They had come upon a rabbit in a trap, not dead; and when she had turned sick at the cries of the hurt thing, he had dragged her away to a fallen log, saying: "Put your head down—so—on your knees. Brings the blood back." And then he had gone away to free the rabbit or to kill it. . . . To-day, even while the sound of his musical drawl was still lingering in her ears—to-day it seemed that he was the hurt thing in the trap. . . .

She dropped her face upon her knees; but too late, for with the very act her thinking came to an end.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE TRAP.

A GREAT shock mercifully stuns, and blunts the edges of feeling; but the little attendant circumstances of life that hover round it sting waspishly, although the very pain of them may speed the healing of the hurt.

The soft-toned gong from Sumatra that announced luncheon stirred Folly from her realisation that the centre of her life was no longer her husband and child, but this man whom she had once held lightly and sent away, who had again come to claim her, with the grip of death upon him.

At first she would not go down, and made up a dozen excuses to send; but presently she perceived the futility of resistance. Thousands of times she would have to live through these daily functions—why shirk one? She descended the broad sweep of the stairway, graceful, seemingly nonchalant, and a little late as usual; and, as usual, her husband was waiting for her.

Christie was in a merry mood that day. He was prospering with the world; he had made a lucky deal in Scotland, and had heard upon his return that a doubt-

## Folly

ful speculation had proved a success. He was full of anecdotes and funny stories.

His wife, across the table, found that it was possible to laugh, to listen and comment, to return joke for joke, to eat salad, to talk lightly of her visitor and other matters. The wind chased the clouds along the tree-tops, the fitful sun streaked the grass with gold, the blue Persian dozed on the hearth—all unchanged since breakfast-time. Her husband talked on and on; but what she heard chiefly was the rumble of the north-bound express. Now it would be at this station, and now at this; and now its passengers would be scattering among the thoroughfares of London.

The hour wore away, and Christie said, as they rose from the table: "I shall be busy with the rent-roll all afternoon."

She left him to his cigar, almost glad to return to her trouble. It was a long dizzy journey up the stairway; but she had a faint comfort in the knowledge that she had played well the beginning of the new game.

In the passage above she hesitated just perceptibly, then turned aside into the nursery. The baby was asleep by the fire in the cradle that had rocked four or five generations of Christies. Folly came in so softly that she was not perceived by the nurse sewing in the window embrasure; bent over the child, touched his cheek, drew back the coverlet a trifle, moved the cradle a few paces further from the heat; leaned and looked

## Folly

for some moments, then stole away as silently as she had entered.

She went into her own room, at last alone with her sorrow. Immediately she crossed to the long window that opened upon the balcony, and flung it wide to the sweet air and showery sunshine. "I must keep quiet," she said to herself, "and think it through. It's impossible to go on like this. There's a way out and it's for me to find. I always find a way."

But for a long time she only stared across the fir-tops to the open wold, and beyond the open wold to the cloudy blue Downs that hide the Channel. Her one conscious thought was that in all this bewildering new life of the spring, she alone was in the shadow of death.

To be quiet—she pleaded with herself. Quiet—when the great wings of love were beating in her heart! What in the wide spaces of this earth mattered anything but his life? To go away with him—to be happy a little while; and then—there were many paths that led out of suffering—people had found them before. . .

There flashed before her mind a sudden image of the Morgue at Paris, as she had seen it once in her old student time. For days and days she had walked past the low excrescent structure by the bridge, goading herself into the belief that as an artist she ought to go in, hating herself for her cowardice in shrinking from what was there. And at last she had entered. A choice of ways? There was a man in the prime of life with a bullet-hole in his green and sunken temple; he looked

## Folly

as if he had been clever, prosperous. . . . The girl—drowned, they said, poor thing! Her forehead was too high; it needed curls. Doubtless she had worn them in life and was pretty. Stripped of them, she looked unnaturally bare, immodest. . . . And the old woman—yet not so old—with the cavernous cheeks—they had recorded her as a clear case of starvation. . . . Had one the choice of ways? For Haldane the course was appointed, unless he chose to cut it short. . . .

“So young to die!”—she broke into a sob—“so much too young—O God!” She sank upon her knees and laid her face on her arms crossed on the balustrade. “I must be quiet and find a way.”

One of the gardeners was standing just below, studying with a critical eye the tulip-bed—that same flaunting tulip-bed. He whistled in friendly rivalry with a blackbird that swung on a bough above him. He was to be married soon, she remembered. The banns had been read twice; and Andrew was doing up a cottage for the young folk. Every-day honest love—theirs. They would be poor always, and stupidly happy; and would bring up a large family just as ruddy and stupid and happy. And each of these in turn would find a mate and do likewise; and so they would go on forever and ever, world without end——

“Amen!” she said aloud, and laughed a little; and then again, to think that she had laughed before.

After all, what did it matter whether Haldane, or Andrew, or she, or anybody, was happy? Happiness



## Folly

was a luxury to be snatched in odd moments; but to play the game—that was what we were put into the world for. . . .

There were stone flower-vases at intervals along the balustrade; and from some of these earth had been washed over and strewn along the coping. She began idly to trace a pattern in the clay; to crumble it and toss it in the air.

“Clay—dust—in the wind and sun—wet into clods by the rain—frozen, thawed, mixed, scattered, taken up by plants that are fed upon by beasts—we’re made of that; and to it we return when the circle of transformation is complete. Here’s a speck—Andrew; and one for Haldane and one for me. I push them about, toss them into the air: let them settle where they will. Does God play that way with us, I wonder? . . . And we think that we’re so important; we matter so much to ourselves; perhaps the grains of dust do, too.”

But then she caught her breath with the gasp: “He loves life—I can’t let him die!”

It came to her presently as very odd that she should be striving this way for some one else—she who had always been the centre of her little world. Even in her dimly-remembered home she could see herself as the spoiled baby. At school she had always led in the mischief and the games. With Andrew her comfort was put before every other thing. Only with her child had she begun to learn slowly the joy of giving without return; and now suddenly, the centre of her life was

## Folly

outside herself, and she was struggling to regain her balance. There was an element of unfairness in the dispensation that stirred her to flame: "If I had not sent him away—if I had not tried to do my duty . . . I was willing to give him up; but not for this."

She had walked voluntarily a mile or two along the stony path of virtue; and God had demanded that she follow it all the way through the endless desert. . . .

She must leave this nonsense, she told herself, and come to the facts; and of these the one great reality was that his life was in danger and must be saved. But how? She considered the possibility that the disease might be of a less perilous nature than he had supposed; but she knew that he would not have rested until he had made sure. She even asked herself whether he might have deceived her, to test her love; but the manner of his coming and going was sufficient to vindicate his honour in that. . . . It all turned then on the chance of a remedy. Had they thought of everything? Would they try everything? He was not a rich man—she found some faint comfort in considering ways and means. Her money was tied up; but the income, all or nearly all, she could devote to this purpose. . . . If he would have it? Ah, she must wait until he sent her news, and then everything that brain could devise or hands could effect should be tried. . . . And if in the end it all came to nothing . . . ?

She stepped back into the room and began to move aimlessly about, but all at once put her hands to her

## Folly

ears as if to shut out some unwelcome sound. She knew that the house was absolutely still, and yet the air seemed ringing with the words: "Would you go to him then? Would you go?" She walked up and down, up and down, to avoid answering that question.

In the midst of this hurly-burly, she heard another cry—the angry wail of a child that thinks itself neglected. Mechanically she opened her door and turned towards the nursery, but before she had gone many steps the sound changed into the half-contented gurgle that usually follows gentle jogging on a knee.

On a sudden impulse she turned aside into a room that she used as studio when, as happened more and more rarely, the whim for painting seized her.

"Would you go?" was still in her ears, as she went up to the easel on which stood an unfinished portrait. It seemed to her as she drew near that its quizzical smile deepened, as if saying: "Are you coming, then, after all?"

She drew a long breath as she stood there with her hands clasped behind her. She was always best at portraits, but this was better than she had supposed. She had somehow caught the elusive spirit of the man, which informed the heavy brow, gave changing lights to the gray-blue eyes, twisted the smile and set the jaw, cast a network of fine lines over the tanned skin, thinned and whitened the light hair about the temples. . . . She knew that it was himself. . . .

In the nursery adjoining, the baby's gurgle became

## Folly

again a fretful cry, but ceased suddenly, replaced by the sound of a man's voice humming. She had scarcely realised that it was her husband soothing the child, when he came in through the open door, with the boy in his arms.

She did not move away from the easel. "What do you think of this?"

He lifted his eyebrows, but answered quietly enough: "It's the best thing you have done; but I didn't know he had sat for you."

"Nor did he. I had some rough sketches and a photograph; but it was painted chiefly from memory. It's alive, is it?"

"The hand is particularly good," he commented. "Those cigarette stains now are convincing; and the ring——"

She turned away a moment; she had given Haldane the seal that he always wore on his little finger.

"Better send it to the Academy next March." His tone was cool and critical, but not unfriendly or even suspicious.

"Have you finished for to-day? What were you doing in the nursery? Where's nurse? What's the matter with baby?" she demanded, in a breath.

"Answer 'em all at once—eh?" he said good-humouredly. "Here goes then. Yes. Amusing myself. I don't know—gossiping in the kitchen probably. A fit of temper. Anything else?"

She held out her arms to the child, but was herself taken prisoner.

## Folly

"Now I've got you both," said he. "One for each arm."

She laughed with unnatural shrillness. "Safe. In a trap. How long can you keep me there?"

"How long? As long as I please. Or rather"—his underlip shot out—"as long as you like to stay. I don't want you longer than that."

She laughed again, and he demanded the reason.

"I was remembering what Mab Patrick said to me on our wedding-day—that you were so *suitable*—that was her word. But if it's true, you know, you'll be able to keep me in the trap forever."

"I don't want to," said he curtly. "If at any time you wish to go, you can go when you—damn please! I'll not stop you."

"But this?" she wondered, taking the baby from him. "Would this?"

## CHAPTER V.

### AFTER THE GUILLOTINE.

GORE walked slowly down the elm-shaded road to the station, trailing his stick behind him, and whistling under his breath. He was meditating that the process of guillotine was not so unpleasant, once the head had rolled into the basket. Love—passion—hope—responsibility—worry—despair were words—breath—lighter than thistle-down; what remained was the present moment untouched by the shadow of past or future.

A small boy in pursuit of a cat plumped squarely into him, was seized and held fast: "What's your wish, my man? What do you want more than anything else in the world?"

The urchin stared.

"Come, now, tell me. You shall have it."

"Pho!"—with the contempt of unbelief. "Lemme go." The prisoner wriggled vainly for freedom.

"I mean it, you know. You'd better tell."

"What you givin' us?" He was still incredulous.

"What you like."

## Folly

Then the boy accepted the situation. "Marbles," he said briefly.

Dazed at first by the coin in his hand, he presently gave a whoop of joy that was worth hearing.

"To-day and to-day," Gore was thinking, as he entered the station. "Three hundred days, perhaps more. It's something even for a penny-poet with the world behind him."

The train was late, but he was not impatient as he strolled up and down the platform, his eyes bent upon a sturdy young willow swaying, although with tough resistance, as the clouds drifted. And as he walked, the words came:

"Oh, the lusty wind is driving his sheep  
In the endless meads of blue;—  
And the whisper that stirs the buds from sleep,  
Biddeth the heart of you:  
'Come, come, with the crust of frost have done!  
To-morrow  
For sorrow,  
To-day be glad in the sun!' "

He was standing under the willow when the rhymes continued, and he listened to them as to a voice singing:

"Oh, the thrill of green on the bare, black tree  
Tingles again in my heart;  
And the things that were, and the things to be,  
And the things for aye set apart,

## Folly

Now—now are all with my life at one!  
To-morrow  
For sorrow,  
To-day be glad in the sun!”

He took out his note-book, but put it away without writing. His to live, not to give—his head seemed full of rhymes, now that he had laid aside rhyming. He had produced his share of poor verses—enough to encourage the paper trade and furnish hack-work to critics. For the rest of his days he would look on, and learn what life could teach a man so sharply and ignominiously relegated to the office of spectator.

After that, for a while he was content not to think at all. His mind was full of scraps of old melodies that he had loved and sung in the past; and these drifted in and out as they would:

“When as the rye reach to the chin,  
And chopcherry, chopcherry ripe within’—

that’s for summer, and it’s only April now.

“Drink to-day and drown all sorrow,  
You shall, perhaps, not do it to-morrow—’

ah, that’s the idea I was trying to get. But as for the wine-bibbing, I think my way is the better.

“The fields breathe sweet, the daisies kiss our feet’—



## Folly

there now, I shall have time to read my Chaucer again.

“‘Young lovers meet,’

—and Petrarch—

‘old wives a-sunning sit’—

here’s another chap has found out the joy of the sun. It was all said centuries ago—all I could ever find to write . . . ”

He travelled third class, with a feeling that in his detachment—perhaps because of it—he must keep near to humanity. As a broken link, he felt the more his place in the chain. But the crowded stuffy carriage changed his mood. At first, some chance association brought up a memory of his initial journey to London, nearly twenty years before. He had travelled in a carriage as tightly packed, as evil-smelling, no doubt; but then his eager fingers were feeling for the pulse of life, and—droll enough—he was too keenly alert, too forward, too strenuous, to count its beats. He was blinded by his own hopes, deafened by the rhymes he was to sing, to the reality about him. . . . On this day, he could look quietly and see things as they were; but looking, he grew chilled. He believed that he could read, in a measure, the history of each face; and he was saddened by the sordid commonplaces they seemed to tell. Narrow and respectable, careworn always, smug occasionally, diseased here and there—

## Folly

bodies and souls moving restlessly, working aimlessly, bound, according to their various lights, for the kingdom of heaven—what had he in common with such as these? Like them, he was born and grew, loved and worked and suffered, and would die; but, for the rest, there was the gulf between them, that they accepted whatever came, with small thought and less questioning, while he pondered and strove to find the reason beneath the things themselves. . . . He smiled at his own conceit; but soon, wearied of this unprofitable comparison, he turned to his window and watched the gliding past of the chequered earth, with the green pasture-lands, budding crops in the red-brown loam, and distant purple-blue woods. He reminded himself that he was living in the moment now; and yet the more that he strove to fix his attention on the visible colours without, the more he found himself fluttering over the pages of the invisible book of memory.

He seemed to see again the Yorkshire fells, and an Irish mother who danced with him in and out of the heather; the dull form of an ancient grammar school as case-hardened as four hundred years of tradition could make it; and then his father's warehouse and the sickening smell of the wool. For him the bells of Beverley tolled out nothing but wool—wool—wool—all the long years that he sat at his desk alternating accounts with surreptitious verses on stray sheets of paper.

His reward came on his twenty-first birthday, when,

## Folly

by way of gift, his father announced that he should thenceforward have a third part interest in the business. All at once it had seemed to him that his throat and nostrils and eyes were stuffed with wool, that it was packed about him, smothering him, until at length he freed himself by choking out the words: "I don't want it. I'm going to be a poet."

"God-dam!"—he could hear yet the amazed voice of his father. "You are, are ye? And when, I should like to know?"

"Now."

"And where, then?"

"In London."

The old man looked at him, knocking the end of his stick against the floor, as if with the fierce desire of beating something. There were sparks in his blue eyes, but his voice was quiet—too quiet—as he growled: "And what have ye got to write about?" His question was wiser than he knew.

"Wool!—" the boy had laughed Byronically. "But I shall learn something else."

Then the old man had fallen a-trembling, and his voice rose high: "Poet, is it? And you the only son I've got! That's your mother's doing; and she in her grave. Poet? Like Tom Moore and all that ruck? Be off, then! To-day, mind! I'm done with ye—God-dam!"

And so he had journeyed up to London with a bagful of verses, and had found them poor provender. He

## Folly

had the usual experience to look back upon—alternations of debt and starvation; but in the course of a year or two he had acquired the rudiments of the art of pot-boiling.

He smiled now to remember how, the winter's night on which he had received his first cheque, he had sat down and written a letter to his father, asking to be taken back, and concluding: "Wool-stapling is about as pleasant as this and much more honourable, and pays many times over." For hours he had sat huddled in a blanket, turning the letter about in his stiff fingers; and in the end he had thrust it into the candle-flame, with a "Hang it! I'll hold on."

It was a curious apprenticeship for a poet—sixpenny lodging-houses, the Salvation Army Shelters, the Embankment, the Park; stone-breaking, harvesting, hop-picking in summer (barring the time he was at sea); in winter, copying at the British Museum, with one deadly season of clerkship in the office of a Jewish pawn-broker. And much of the while there went on, mornings and nights and odd moments, the heart-gnawing, brain-lacerating business of competing with other starveling producers of rubbish—more often unsuccessfully—in fifth-rate penny papers; and off and on there was an addition to the bookful of unpublished verses.

In the end he was defeated, came to the blank wall of destitution; and, sucked of vitality and hope, fell into the way of a recruiting sergeant and took the Queen's shilling.

## Folly

The African pictures were less sharp to remember. He saw himself again as despatch rider in the Yeomanry, captured and shut up in a Boer prison for getting rid of the documents that he carried; he saw Pietje Volkers, who had disguised him as a Dutch woman and helped him through the gate, and sobbed on his shoulder in Dutch and English, when he was safely past the sentries. He remembered with a thrill a horse which had scrambled under fire up the side of a *kopje* that ordinary beasts refused to climb; and with a kind of wonder, he saw himself on the summit of this same hill, crouching behind his dead horse—himself dehumanized, half-blind, half-dead, shooting like a machine and ticking off one mark after another as it dropped, with no consciousness that he was turning living targets into carrion. And he had set out to be a poet!

He saw himself penniless in Cape Town, joking himself into a job in the Public Works Department—nothing less than a billet as lamp-lighter—and favoured by virtue of his gentlemanly and literary propensities as evinced in the joke, with a series of unfrequented back streets. And at the last enteric had done for him, and brought him to a sort of missionary home where the mode of life for a time had pricked him into a violent and unnatural atheism. . . .

At the dramatic moment came a letter saying that his father was dead and had left him—perhaps ironically—two hundred a year for life; and that the capital of this annuity was to be turned over at his death to

## Folly

one of the many charitable institutions that swallowed the bulk of the fortune.

Two hundred a year—well, it enabled him to bring out a thin volume of verses. Fame turned an eye upon him. He produced a more ambitious collection and a play. Fame smiled, and all doors were thrown open. He found himself in comfortable chambers, with money in his purse, and more sudden friendships than he knew what to do with. He met Folly and began to flatter himself that he knew the meaning of life. She had sent him away, but his very exile had not lacked romance until the unlooked-for pain was there, and the iridescent bubble that he had been blowing until it was inconceivably perfect and radiant, and he thought that he held it safe in his hand—broke and left nothing but an invisible speck of soapy moisture.

He turned away from this to remember the other women who had crossed his path.

“The Rose of Beverley,” who furnished a title for his earliest invention, came first, a fair enough blossom of godly ministerial stock. She would have made an excellent wife for a Yorkshire wool-stapler, perhaps even for one who wrote verses and published them with discreet initials in the local papers, after he had retired from business. Pretty Rose! He had written her the quarter of a century of sonnets, rhyming “hair of gold” with “love that never grows old,” or was it “cold”? She was married long since to a country doctor; and by this time would be as fat as her mother,

## Folly

her rose-leaf cheeks now beefy, and her "hair of gold" a dusty drab. . . .

There was a gap of years between Rose and Léonie. Léonie—Léonie! She belonged to the time of starvation and despair. He could see her still—a slim black figure beneath the light of a street lamp. Very pink and white under her shadowy hat, with the sparkle of diamonds in her ears and of tears in her eyes—that was Léonie. She began with the old story of a lost address, new to him then; and he set out with her to find it, wondering how she came to be hanging on his arm, and why he was telling her his troubles, and silencing all doubts and country scruples with her own explanation, that she was French.

When they found the house, after no great difficulty, and he perceived that he was a dupe and she a decoy, he turned without a word to leave her. A moment the misty darkness was between them; the next, she was clinging to him and her face against his was wet with tears. She had forgotten her rouge as she sobbed out her misery, pleading that he was not like the others, and that she wanted no money, for she must die soon, they had told her, but she was lonely and afraid, and she wanted somebody who was different—different. . . .

He never knew, nor, perhaps, did she, where truth ended and fiction began in her story; but it served its purpose—the devil best knew how—and bound them in an alliance against the terrors of the city.

For months he believed that her anxiety and presci-

## Folly

ence alone had kept him from suicide; and at the same time she put away her false colours, and, for all her wasting, seemed to grow younger. She said that she was happy for the first time within her remembrance.

With the earning of a little money, he offered to marry her, but she laughed in derision: "You—me? What a come-down! Silly, you will be a great man one day, and then—poor Léonie! *Non, non!*"

When he pressed the matter, she would only sing:

*"Le pauvre merle n'a perdu le bec."*

When he appealed to her reason, she retorted in music,

*"Comment chantera-t-il le merle?"*

until the cough came upon her and thrust everything else aside.

"When I am dead——" she began once.

He could not quieten her.

"But, yes, I shall be dead—you do not believe? You must go to sea. And why? To let the winds blow away"—she turned a sob into a shrug—"the memory of me. It is better you should forget. You did not yet know much, although you have more years than I. But you may remember me one little bit—not more. Sometimes I can see you as you will be. If I had been a man—but there, I was poor, and I never had one chance. You can grow out of the mud . . . And there will be another woman, but no matter for her now."



## Folly

She never would tell her story—said it didn't matter—and presently died. And he, having used his last shilling to bury her, remembered her entreaties, and shipped before the mast. During his first voyage, he wrote several little poems about her, and put them away with the others, and—there was no more to be said of Léonie.

The other women all belonged to his prosperous time; the memories of them glided past the carriage-window more quickly than the fields without. They made a quaint enough procession: a farmer's daughter with whom he had tossed hay; a frail poet for whom he had translated Heine; a pretty miss of ample means and irreproachable family, whom he had thought of marrying until he heard by chance that she had already planned her trousseau, and the site and furnishing of her house, while waiting for him to come to the point; a baronet's widow who expounded his verse to her friends; and Folly. . . .

He looked up, relieved to find that the carriage was nearly empty. There remained only one other man, who sat coughing in the opposite corner.

"Not much better off than I am," thought Gore.

His first impression of Folly was so overlaid with embroideries of his later fancy that it was difficult to disentangle. They had met at a small club that he occasionally attended for the side-lights that it threw on human nature.

It was one Crandall, a newspaper man, who had first

## Folly

introduced him to the *Disciples of Isis*, with the comment that the men, one and all, "just escaped greatness," while the women were "elect souls who cultivated and adored the talents neglected by a blind world." He had concluded: "They're all rather mad, but amusing, you know."

So Gore had gone and listened to a paper on the symbolism of Tennyson's "Maud," and had come home and laughed a year's laughing over the exposition. In the heat of the discussion he had been struck by an opinion expressed. A spectacled young philosopher had risen and begun his speech with: "A day or two ago, I heard Mrs. Christie say that half of 'Maud' is rot and the other half is rubbish. . . ."

"Who is Mrs. Christie?" asked Gore, amused at her heresy.

"One of the vice-presidents," said Crandall. "Not here to-night. I met her years ago in Paris, when I was on the *World*, and she was a gawky art student, living in an attic in the Montparnasse. I believe she rowed her guardian no end to get there; and finally broke away from him, and hired an aunt to go about with her. Her father was a military man, you know—K. C. B. and all that. He died out in India, I believe— . . . We had some good times together. Not so bad at her work—a certain amount of style and a trick of catching likenesses. She might have come on; but she married a comfortable man, and art flew out the window. It's all the same, I suppose—no genius

## Folly

wasted. Incidentally, she has become charming and leads her husband a life—and some of the rest of us as well. Of course, she only comes here for a laugh occasionally.”

“What is she like?” Gore had felt impelled to ask.

“Oh, I don’t know. You can’t put her into a word or two. Want to meet her—eh? I’ll manage it. She’s not a beauty—Lord, no! But she’s good fun, in a Lucrezia Borgia sort of way.”

He had been amused and interested, and had endured to be bored by the *Disciples* several times before the opportunity came of meeting her. He never could remember the details clearly, but suddenly he heard her name; she was looking at him; and he had set up a little separate shrine for her in his soul—an altar only this morning stripped of its flowers and dismantled.

He often thought that it was her voice that charmed him first. Before he could tell what she looked like, her marvellous tone-music was changing the world for him, with its eager: “I have read every word you have written!”

“Not you!” he had laughed, remembering the host of unsigned pot-boilers.

She had guessed his thought: “Then I hope to find the others before I die.”

“Heaven forbid!” he had exclaimed.

“I believe”—she had paused so long that he had time to study the peculiar brightness of her eyes, the whimsical delicate curves of her lips, the halo from the light

## Folly

above on her fine-spun hair. "I believe the world has used you badly—so badly that you don't care——"

"And that's true," he had admitted, taking up her unfinished sentence.

"Can't we make it good to you in one way or another?" She was ready for flight to some one awaiting her across the room.

"If I may be so bold"—he was beginning; but she understood and anticipated him.

"Tuesdays"—and gave an address in Sloane Street.

They looked at each other a long moment, he dazed with the rush of new feeling; she, with a curious expression of uncertainty, of doubt, of regret even, as if she had been over-hasty.

"Beg pardon, sir. Do you live in London?" a voice broke in upon his dream.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FELLOW-MAN.

THE man in the opposite corner had moved along to the seat facing him and was leaning forward eagerly.

“I have lived there. Why?”

“I’m going up for the first time in many years,” said the stranger. “To a hospital, to be looked over. I thought you might know which is the best.”

“I see,” answered Gore, and studied the man’s face before he spoke further. It was hollow and heavily shadowed, but the eyes were eager and hopeful. If he had any doubt that it was a case of phthisis, he would have known by the deep-set futile cough that the man strove to smother in his handkerchief.

“There’s not much the matter,” he declared, when he could speak. “Only this cough, and getting rather thin. But the missus was that bent on my coming; she believes in being on the safe side.”

“Just so,” said Gore. “Well, there’s Guy’s, and Bart’s, and St. Thomas’s, and Charing Cross, and half a dozen others. I don’t know that there’s much to choose among them. Or Brompton. I believe Brompton is especially good for”—he hesitated.

## Folly

“For what, sir?” was the eager question.

“For a cough,” said Gore gently.

“Then I’d maybe best go there. The missus, she does worry that much about my cough. She’d have come with me herself, only there’s nobody to mind the shop. I’m a greengrocer, sir, in Guildford. I believe I’ve got one of my cards here. As neat a little place as you could fancy; and we have built up the business ourselves within the last dozen years. It would be a pity to have it fall to pieces; and the kids are all at school yet. . . .”

It struck Gore, as he studied the bit of pasteboard that summed up the calling of “Thomas Stubbs, Greengrocer,” that here was a case of special pleading. To avoid answering it, he asked: “How did you get your cough?”

“It’s only a bit of a cold, sir—came on in the winter, through driving about in the rain, I suppose. I was for going to the chemist to get some stuff; but my missus, she do set her foot down sometimes, and she said I must go to one of the big London hospitals and have it put right at once. There’s no use holding out against the missus when she makes up her mind to a thing, so off I come.”

“They know more about these things in London,” said Gore, at a loss for encouragement.

“So they do, sir; and yet I’m fearful—there ain’t no sense in it, but it runs in our family to think so—that once I get into their clutches, it’ll be none so easy to get out again.”

## Folly

"Nonsense. How many children have you?"

"Four, but we've buried eight." He was plainly surprised at the question.

"They died—young?" Gore found it difficult to get to the point.

"Different ages, sir. Didn't seem to have no constitutions to speak of. Sometimes it was a mere cold. . . ."

"And your parents?" Gore persisted.

"I don't remember my father. They say he dropped down one day with a bad heart; but mother, she lived on a few years, always a-coughing. . . ."

He stopped, moved by some strange association of ideas, then said: "You'll be thinking we're a weakly lot. May I ask if you're a doctor yourself, sir?"

"No, but I've a friend who'll be able to tell you what to do. He's one of the cleverest doctors in London. We'll ask him."

The greengrocer looked worried: "Begging your pardon, sir, but it would come expensive."

"Let that take care of itself—I'll see to it."

Stubbs gazed through the window: "A man must make some sort of fight for his life."

Gore started and frowned, then asked: "Why?"

"Why? Why? Now, that's not so easy to put into words. I suppose it's nature. If you was to see a bull coming for you across a field, you'd either get out of his way or face him square; you wouldn't stand still and let him mangle you—but I don't know why. If you was

## Folly

dropped into the water, you'd strike out, even if you couldn't swim; and if you was took bad of a sudden, you wouldn't turn your face to the wall and give up. When a man don't know what he's made for, or what he's got to do, it's his business to hang on as long as he can—leastways, to my thinking."

Gore looked at him meditatively: "You want to live—to be an old man?"

He leaned forward, his clasped hands shaking between his knees, and returned to his special pleading: "It's against nature to die young. I tell you, I've one of the nicest little homes in Guildford. I can't be asked to leave it; it wouldn't be fair. Just when I'd got it all a-going—and the children getting on so well at their school—that's why I don't want to take no risks. I'm young yet, you see, not forty—no, sir, not forty. I've got thirty good years to live yet—thirty, sure, accordin' to the Bible—and maybe more—maybe more. There's time enough to begin to think about going."

"Thirty years?" thought Gore. "Thirty months, perhaps, or less; and he knows it in his heart. Poor wretch, he's fighting against a dead certainty."

"My boy Tom, now," continued the eager voice, "he's almost a man; in ten years or so he'll be able to manage the business. And George, he takes to his books like a parson; I want to lay by a bit to help him to more schooling. And the little kid, he's hardly learned to kick his heels about yet, but he fights his



## Folly

mother like a Dutchman. S'help me, I shouldn't wonder if I lived to see him a general!"

"He's talking at God through me," mused Gore, "begging off—sneaking out." Aloud he asked: "Any girls?"

"Lucy—her mother worries now and then because she's not so strong as some; but she'll come on all right. I'm planning to buy her an organ next year, or maybe a small piano, if I can get one cheap, second-hand. I'd like her to be able to do something besides housework when we come to be thinking about a husband for her. . . ."

He stopped, short of breath, and suddenly buried his face in his hands; as suddenly raised his haggard eyes to Gore's, as if he expected to surprise the truth there: "Would it seem just to you, sir?"

"I don't know that I can tell you what is just and unjust," answered Gore, "but it's clear to me that you want to live, though you don't know why."

"It's good enough, this life," said the greengrocer, with something of dogged despair in his tone; "and for all the parsons' talking, we don't know much about any other."

Gore looked at him with a sort of contrition. A while before, he had said to himself that these people did no thinking; and here was his same problem of life and death cropping up, and a fellow-man wrestling with it. What could he say to help?

"It's no good worrying," he got out at length.

## Folly

“What’s to be is to be—doesn’t that satisfy you?”

The greengrocer looked at him: “Put yourself in my place, sir.”

Gore smiled faintly: “That’s soon done. What then?”

“What then?”—the other man grew fierce. “How would you feel—that’s what I want to know!”

Gore pondered: “Well, there are two ways of taking it: to be resigned and to make a fight. The former is temptingly easy; but the latter—I believe you are right—it’s the good fight that counts; the rest doesn’t matter.”

“It matters a deal to me,” said the other man.

“Ah, but it doesn’t lie in your hands, you know”—he wondered that he should be prescribing for his own case from his diagnosis of another’s.

He considered then how it would be to take his own advice. Here was Gregory insisting that he himself needed a holiday, urging that they go away somewhere together, suggesting this and that in the way of treatment. What if a man ought to fight. . . .

“You’ll see the doctor,” he said aloud. “You’ll both do what you can; and whether you win or not, that’s the end of the matter for you.”

“I must win,” muttered the man.

But Gore had a dim memory of some old Norseman who was thrust into a torture-pit full of serpents, who nevertheless sang to the very end, to chagrin his foes: “I shall die laughing.”

## Folly

Defeat of the body was certain; but who should claim victory over the soul? He felt a thrill of admiration for the little greengrocer who had roused his own spirit of war. A thought of the woman intruded; but he thrust it away.

“Below hatches!”—he smiled to himself. “None but fighting-men on deck.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### SUSPENSE.

THROUGH May and June and July, Folly was waiting at Sunlands for news that never arrived; and early in August Mabel Patrick wrote that she was coming down for a few days.

Christie was unfeignedly glad to hear of her proposed visit. He had reached the conclusion that to understand Folly he needed more brains than he had been taught to believe he possessed. There seemed no end to the vagaries that sometimes drove him to the woods to meditate upon the possibilities of the married state.

Early in May, he thought to please her by voluntarily suggesting—where always before he had required to be teased—that it was time they should transfer themselves to town.

“I’m not going at all this year,” she answered. “Let the house, if you like.”

Delighted but dazed, he felt it his duty to make sure: “But you always——?”

“Not this year,” she said. “I want to be quiet at Sunlands.”

## Folly

He shook his head over her: "You've lost your wits, I take it."

"Oh, no," she retorted lightly, "but I've acquired an infant, you see."

This might be a part of the miracle, he reasoned; but he could offer nothing further in the way of an explanation. He was content to cover up his secret delight with an indifferent, "As you please," and to write at once to his agent, lest she change her mind about the house.

But if he hoped for peace, he found it only in his woods and streams. In the house he was haunted by a sense of vague unrest, reflected from her restlessness, to which he had no clue.

He had his own method of dealing with her unreasonable irritability, and occasionally he scored, as for instance:

"Andrew, what makes you so freckled?" she asked one day at breakfast.

"The sun, I suppose," he answered absently, absorbed in the day's quotations.

"Can't you do anything about it?" she continued impatiently.

"Do?" He roused himself a moment. "Do about it? What? Oh, the sun—freckles, I mean. Certainly, stay in the house, and I won't!" He retired within the shell of his newspaper.

Another time: "You're the woodenest-looking man I know!"

## Folly

“Do you want to paint my portrait? I’ll get up an expression. But I can’t look like Gore. Are you cold?”

She had shivered and moved away.

He had not the faintest conception how his good-natured indifference teased her nerves until she wished that he would fall into a rage and break furniture. He had no idea how she hated the shabby comfortable clothes that he wore—open-air clothes redolent of the woods, that suited his figure as the bark suits a tree. Nor did he dream of the torture to her of the three meals a day with him—hours when she was goaded into saying cruel things, the more so when the grim set of his lips told that she had reached the quick.

He gathered chiefly that she had always an inordinate desire for the post, and that she was perpetually disappointed of something that she expected, inasmuch as she was most unbearable as soon as she had seen the letters.

One morning, as he was observing this peculiarity, he had an inspiration that broke forth into a quite unpremeditated remark:

“Is it that little fool man that’s troubling you?”

She looked at him straight. “You mean Haldane Gore? I haven’t seen him since April”—she caught back the date—“nor heard from him for—I forget how long. We don’t write.”

He pushed back his chair so hastily that it fell over,

## Folly

and went to stand by the window, pursuing his thought aloud: "If I thought you wanted him——"

He turned to study her, but her face was mocking: "Well?" she asked. "What then?"

"If I thought you did—you should have him and be—damned!" he concluded, under his breath.

She laughed: "You don't know. Perhaps I shouldn't be damned. God might be merciful, as they say He is just."

"It's no good asking you," he persisted.

"Not the least bit in the world. Here's a letter from Mab. She's coming down in a day or two—a visit of ceremony to the baby, she says."

Christie selected and lighted a pipe, with the look of one who is considering deeply.

Presently he said: "And I've an invitation here from Flood. He's going to cruise for a fortnight about the Balearic Islands. Should you mind if I join him?"

He was quick enough to catch her look of relief. Indeed, he had prepared the trap and she had walked into it. She was glad to be rid of him, then, he saw. But at least—it was some comfort—she could scarcely be in better hands than Mrs. Patrick's.

"We shall try to do without you," said Folly, with an assumption of regret. "Mab will be disappointed; but by this time she's used to your sudden flights. We shall be dull, of course."

He looked at her a bit wistfully: "It isn't exactly dul-

## Folly

ness I should complain of. But it seems somehow as if the skies had fallen these last few months."

"So they have," she said quietly.

He waited a while; then: "Can't you tell a fellow?"

It was her turn to pause. "Not easily," she said at length. "I will, if you insist."

He waved away the idea: "It must come of your own accord. But tell Mab if you can."

"I will try," she said, meeting his eyes honestly.

So Christie went away yachting, without further questions; and soon after, Mrs. Patrick came down to inspect and pass judgment on the youthful heir. This occupied her quite a day; and it was not until the second luncheon that she gave a glance to the mother:

"You're looking well, Folly mine."

"Thanks. It's gratifying," was the dry answer.

"But aren't you well?"

"Blooming."

"Then what——?"

"I am gaining in weight, I believe. I shall be a fat old lady, if I live long enough. But I don't consider the topic edifying."

"Edifying—fancy!" lisped Mabel. "Do you want to be edified? I shall not make talk any more. I try to be polite about your two Dandies and you answer me in monosyllables; I mention your health and you cut me short——"

"Mab, do you know a Mr. Gregory?" interrupted Folly brusquely.



## Folly

Mrs. Patrick looked uncomfortable: "Know him? Yes. Why?"

"What is he like?"

"Tall, thin,—ancient Egyptian eyes and nose and beard——"

"Stuff! I don't mean his looks."

"Soft of speech and—and sharp of knife," said Mabel, with a nervous little laugh.

"Good at his work, then?"

"Rather. But he wastes a lot of time over pathology—they say. It's a pity."

"Why?" Folly was upon her.

"Because he'd get on faster if he stuck to the one thing. But, anyway, he's assistant surgeon at one of the big hospitals. Guy's? No, 'pon my word, I forget."

"Is he quite the best man you know?" Folly was very much in earnest.

Mabel blushed: "I protest! This catechism is growing lop-sided. It's my turn now. What do you want to know for?"

"Don't bother!" Folly thrust this aside. "I have a good reason."

"Bless the girl!" Mabel was playing rather nervously with her glass. "I've heard people say"—her colour came and went—"that he's very good indeed for some things."

"What things?"

"Oh, heaven knows! I'm not going to answer any more foolish questions."

## Folly

She made a hasty flight for the door but was captured and pinioned in Folly's strong arms, while Folly's voice said imperatively: "Tell me."

"He's been very successful with some delicate operations," she confessed, toying with Folly's chain. "There was an account of one in the *Lancet*. I didn't understand it very well; but it had something to do with the throat——"

"Throat?" Folly let her escape and made no attempt to follow.

But a few moments later, as Mrs. Patrick sat in her room over a letter that made no headway—sat by a window with a puzzled worried look in her eyes—she was not astonished to find her hostess standing over her.

"I want his address, Mab."

"Queen Anne Street," said Mabel. "Wait a minute. I'll find you the number. But he's abroad now. Do you want to consult him?"

"Yes," said Folly, and for a second it seemed as if she might speak. Then she drew on the mask: "For adiposity. I wish to be a thin old woman."

Mrs. Patrick put out a hand and pulled Folly down to her knees on the floor: "There's no necessity, if you go on this way. I knew you were not all right, of course, but I wanted you to tell me."

"Tell you what?" said Folly obstinately. "I'm well enough."

"Perhaps. But your mind—or spirit, shall we say?

## Folly

—is being torn to rags. Come up to Whitby with me. Oh, don't jerk away like that. Don't breathe, if I tell you a secret. I'm writing a novel; and it's to be out in the spring if I have to pay for it myself. Come along and help me, and you may forget your troubles."

"It's a pity you've a good income, Mab," was the unexpected reply.

"Cross my heart! Now all my investments will blow up, or whatever it is investments do when you don't get any money. I don't want to be poor."

"No, but you might have a chance of doing something, if you were. You've got ability enough; but the way is made too easy for you. You just play at work."

"And a lucky thing, too, in this stupid old world, that some people do play. We're far too solemn. Don't preach at me. You look like a tragedy queen; but I'm too fat and rosy to belong to the order of Poor Things, and I won't. If my dear husband hadn't left me enough to live on, I might have done some lively worrying by this time; but—thank heaven, he did, so I needn't bother. I'm not like you: I don't wear myself away to rags over an invisible and intangible trouble. Never mind, I'll write a good book when you've painted a good picture."

"I've done that," answered Folly, with sombre eyes; and put aside Mabel's eager questions with, "No, it isn't on exhibition. I must go and write to Mr. Gregory."

"But I told you he was away. Oh, yes, letters will be

## Folly

forwarded, of course, if that would do you any good."

After a silence, Mabel looked out across the fir-wood, saying softly: "We're like Pyramus and Thisbe, you and I. We love each other; but there's a great wall between us."

Folly said nothing.

"Can't we break it down?"

After a pause: "I don't see how."

"Well"—Mabel made a brave pretence at cheerfulness—"we shall have to squint through the hole, then. But—should you mind very much if I tell you the name of that wall? It's Haldane Gore."

At this, Folly's head dropped lower, until her face was hidden in Mabel's lap. There was a silence until Mrs. Patrick said, with a caressing hand on the soft light hair, "You want to confess and can't, it seems. I suppose I must do it for you. Of course, I understood from the very first that you were—oh, well, not in love with him—we'll admit that there's no word for it in English. But, as I have tried vainly to hint to you several times, I don't think you knew—quite—how serious a matter it was for him. I gather now that there have been complications, and that you've found out, and that you're having a bad attack of conscience——"

"Not conscience," whispered Folly. "If it were only that——"

"Only!" gasped Mabel. "What's the world coming to? Well, then, what?"

## Folly

Folly lifted a flushed face: "I'd like to tell you, Mab, but I can't; the words stick. Wait till I've seen Mr. Gregory. When do you think he will be back?"

"I'm not his keeper, dear—really; I don't know. And I don't see what he has to do with your case."

But Folly seemed not to have heard her: "I've waited three months and more; I can't stand it much longer. I'd go to-morrow and—and find somebody else; but, honestly, I'm afraid—afraid to leave Dandie for fear I should never. . . ."

"The baby?" Mabel scoffed. "You are a devoted mother!"

"No, I meant my husband," answered Folly slowly.

"Truly, you've lost your senses," laughed Mabel. "He has no scruples about leaving you."

"He knew I wanted to be rid of him," said Folly quietly. "He got on my nerves. But I'm afraid—if I once got away—there's no telling what—what I might do. . . . I might not come back. . . ."

"Why, dear child, dear child, you're forgetting all about the baby."

"Oh, no!" The tawny head went down again to be stroked by Mabel's dimpled comforting hands. "I'm hanging on to him for dear life!"

Mrs. Patrick thought a little while before she observed: "You're making a great mystery of something; and if you can't tell me, there's an end of it. But you mustn't deny that you're fond of little Dandie——" she waited.

## Folly

"He's all right," Folly granted.

"And he ought to keep you straight. He's a sensible laddie—admires his mother already—howls for her, even in the arms of his nurse. . . ."

"He'll outgrow all that," said Folly. "He may live to curse me for bringing him into this cheerful world, as I have cursed my——"

"Oh, hush," said Mabel. "Let the dead rest."

"I never loved them. How could I? I never knew them. I was a mere babe when they sent me away to school, and went off to India and died of cholera. I call it shirking parental duties!"

"Well, don't be so fierce," pleaded Mabel. "I don't suppose they enjoyed dying of cholera."

"I could have forgiven them if they had taken me along, because then I might have died of it, too, years ago. But it's hard lines that just because they wanted to marry I should have to pay the penalty for such a long time. . . ."

"I don't know what you mean," said Mabel. "I don't suppose you could help being; I daresay you wanted to be. And if you hadn't been their child, you would have been other people's. But what is the good speculating about such things? If you want me to declare that there's a curse upon you, working itself out to a bitter Nemesis, I'll do so at once, and then we'll be all comfy again."

Her purring voice made Folly smile. She seized the plump hands as if she found strength or comfort in

## Folly

them, and said more quietly: "You were always a mainstay, Mab—through all those lonely school-days. Be good to me now. I can tell you only this: if you knew that some horrible thing was coming down upon you—swiftly, surely, inevitably—and you could not run away, or stop it, or lift a finger against it, or do anything but wait and count off the days before you knew it must happen. . . ."

"But you wouldn't, you know," said Mab comfortably. "Things don't come about that way."

"Yes."

"Rubbish! Nonsense! You exaggerate. It won't be as bad as you say; or even suppose it is, you'll have the strength to bear it. Why, you suffer fifty times over in anticipation. Have a little faith and wait. You never know what turn——"

"Faith in what?" said Folly bitterly. "Miracles?"

"Faith in"—Mabel hesitated—"faith in the 'ultimate decency of things.'"

Folly got to her feet: "I haven't risen to that creed yet. But I'm only boring you. Shall we go for a drive, or—or what?"

Mabel held fast to her hands so that she could not get away.

"I had such a vivid memory of you just now—at the old studio—Lamoreau's—remember? I was very late and the rest of you had been at work a long while. You had a model posed as a Greek athlete, and he had fainted. . . ."

## Folly

"He had been starving for a week. I remember."

"—and fell and cut his head on the edge of the dais. It happened just before I came in; and what did I find? All the other girls huddled and chattering and crying; and you alone on the platform, with his head in your lap. I can see you this minute, with your frowsy hair—it was so then, dear—and a charcoal smudge on your nose, and the blood dripping between your fingers as you held the cut together."

"It was nothing," said Folly. "You had the sense to send for Lamoreau and a doctor. What's your moral?"

"Only that you've got a man's courage, girl; and if you're in trouble, you'll fight it through like a man. There now! Don't say Mab has no faith in you."

"I'll wait," said Folly. "I'll hang on to the last notch—if only for the baby's sake. But when I reach the breaking-point——"

"You won't break," said Mabel. "Trust me. And when I can help——"

"I suppose," said Folly, with a curious smile, "that God could help; but—somehow I've given over praying. . . ."



## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE DEVIL PLAYS DUMMY.

ONE morning in October, when blue haze was folding in hills and sea, Mrs. Christie the elder was sitting alone in her drawing-room, tinkling over minuets by Haydn and Mozart, and now and then forgetting them in memories more than half a century old, as her sweet blue eyes gazed across the dim waters of the bay. And so dreaming and fingering, she was startled out of her serenity by the abrupt entrance of her daughter-in-law, smart and smiling gaily, with feverish cheeks and restless eyes.

“Good-morning, materkin,” she called from the door. “The bad penny again.”

The little old lady, pluming herself after the swift and reckless embrace, and adjusting her glasses over eyes that saw far more than they appeared to see, asked shrewdly: “Well, Folly, well? How are you? You look your name to-day.”

Thereupon the visitor flung a feather-adorned Gainsborough hat on the table, whence it dropped to the fender without attracting her attention, and drew a footstool up to the old lady’s knee, saying cheerfully:

## Folly

“Do you want to keep me out of the clutches of the devil, materkin? You’re the one person in the world who might do it.”

“Blue devils?” was the dry response. “Take a tonic.”

Thereupon the old lady settled the folds of her black satin gown, arranged her fichu, played with her rings and even turned her delicate white-rose face seaward again, as she awaited a storm of protest, or ridicule, or temper. Folly hated the bare suggestion of illness. But nothing came; there was an abject silence until the elder woman looked back with a brisk: “What’s up? I smell feathers singeing.”

“I am,” said Folly calmly, as she rescued her hat, “altogether—unless you find a way out.”

“Materkin” dimpled all about her sweet mouth. “Symptoms?” she asked.

“I’ve no symptoms.” Folly was still quiet. “You don’t believe me?”

“I always believe you. I’m sure it’s very bad. How are my two boys?”

“Well.”

“Andrew didn’t come with you?”

“No; he went to a meeting of the Archæological Society. They’ve dug up some scraps of a Roman villa near the mouth of the Leigh.”

“Why didn’t you bring the baby to visit his grandmother?”

“Honestly, I wanted to see if I could do without

## Folly

him, or he without me. And then I have some business to see to. A baby is so fearfully dependent on one, mater."

"You mean, one is so fearfully dependent on a baby."

"I thought when they were once weaned"—began the daughter-in-law.

"That shows how little you know about it. There's all the great business of teething; and before that's very far on, you have to begin to think about talking and walking. And then, before you can draw a long breath, you find yourself in for measles, whooping-cough, chicken-pox, croup . . . I had no end of trouble with my Andrew. Croup, you know. Night after night, I thought he would never see the morning. But we're a tough lot, we Christies—tougher than your side of the family, my dear. We needn't worry about mumps and scarlatina yet a while. When they do come, you won't have any time to be tired of life."

This was a shrewd hit. Folly said: "There are other things in the world besides babies."

"Heaven forbid that I should deny it!" returned the old lady. "But then, you see, a first baby is such a distraction and an amusement and a game altogether; I should think he might occupy you for a while. I never had but the one," she added regretfully, then laughed—"so I gave him a lot of bringing up."

"Tell me how you manage it, mater," said Folly, having scarcely heard this. "I know you do care for

## Folly

all the little daily things about you. That's why I came to you. I want to learn. . . ."

"Do you need to learn to be interested in your own child? Come, now," said the old lady. "It's different with me. I've only the little things left. What else should I do with them? Swear at them?"

"And you never get tired living?"

"Why should I? I'm too old for all that nonsense. I'm in for a good time now."

"If I could ever get to that——"

"In fifty years?" was suggested.

"But when one is young, it's all trouble and temptation——"

"You children always want to eat your cake and have it. What's wrong now?"

Folly shook her head to indicate the difficulty of explaining.

"Tell Andrew then."

Folly laughed at the idea. "But, mater, can you think what it would be like to have the thumb-screw on for months?"

"No, and I don't suppose you can. It's more likely that you've stuck your thumb into a crack, and wonder now why the door pinches it. I hate talking in the dark. Let's drop the matter till after luncheon, and then you'll tell me what's on your mind. I'll be seeing about your room now." The old lady swished away, pleased with the fancy that she still did her own housekeeping.

## Folly

Folly stood idly by the desk, looking across the garden to the sea:

“I wonder what she would say if I told her the whole story? If it came to a question of my going—but it won’t, of course. . . . Still, I should have to have money, or I should be no good—only a burden. . . . I shall lose my mind if I keep on like this much longer. . . . ”

She turned away from the desk, stooping to pick up some papers that her sleeve had brushed to the floor, and found that they were three ten-pound notes. Careless little mater! was her thought. She must lose no end of money, leaving it tucked away in unlocked drawers, and strewn about over her desk. It might be worth while to teach her a lesson.

But indeed her reasoning process was slight and imperfect. The movement was almost instinctive wherewith she thrust the notes into her glove, as she went upstairs.

When she was alone in her room, she drew them forth and looked at them in a kind of surprise, but with scorching cheeks. Then she tossed them carelessly on the sofa, with her wraps, and went to the glass to arrange her hair.

“Thief,” she murmured. “You a thief? It’s rather a joke. Almost worth keeping up for a while. I believe I could do it, if there were any need of money—if it would be of use—but what’s the good?”

A tap at the door sent her to the sofa, all in a flutter;

## Folly

and she answered unsteadily, the notes burning in her pocket.

“No, thank you, Susan, I have everything,” she said to Mrs. Christie’s companion, who had come in to look after her comfort. Her face went hot and cold, and she kept glancing at the sofa, as if she feared that by some magic the notes had got back again.

Throughout luncheon she waited for the loss to be mentioned; but nothing was said. Thirty pounds—not much, in all conscience; yet if she had intended to go. . . . it was a useful sum. But the immediate problem was how to return it gracefully and dramatically. Her mother-in-law was serene, full of mischief, and disposed to tease, and gave her no chance whatever.

After luncheon, when Mrs. Christie was settled for her afternoon nap, Folly found the cigarettes that were always kept for her in a certain drawer of a certain cupboard in the library; and smoked fitfully, as she watched the mist drizzling into a slow rain upon the garden trees and shrubs.

“Myrtle—cedar—rhododendron; rhododendron—cedar—myrtle” she was repeating to herself, without any sense or profit whatever, when she caught sight of Susan hovering in a troubled manner over the desk.

“Lost something?” she was impelled to ask.

“Oh, no, I don’t think so,” said Susan. “Mrs. Christie sent me to—but they don’t seem to be here. Later on, I daresay she’ll remember exactly where she put them.”

## Folly

“If I went up to town to-morrow,” thought Folly, “I could see Mab and ask her whether Mr. Gregory has come home. If not, another doctor . . . I could find out where Haldane is now. . . . But when he has not sent me a word?” Ah, that was the crux! To go when one might be superfluous—unwelcome? And yet not to go when she had the money, and he might be dying for lack of means to do everything possible. . . . “I can’t go,” she said, and threw her cigarette into the fire; but the words that reëchoed in her mind were: “I can’t stay.” Later: “I couldn’t make any of them understand.” And again: “I ought to take every penny that I could get.” And still again: “If I were a man, I should say, ‘Morals be damned!’” Further: “There’d be no harm in asking Mab; she might know something.” And as she rose to go in to tea: “It’s high time to have done with this nonsense and return the notes.”

At tea the talk was of whist. Folly was reluctant; but Mrs. Christie was bent on managing it. “Susan and I will play together, and you shall be Dummy’s partner. That will do very well,—your brain against the two of us. She’ll be back from the post in a moment.”

There was a silence in which Folly might have introduced the matter of the bank-notes; but she chose to say: “I suppose when one’s money is tied up like mine, it’s impossible to get at it.”

“When it’s a lawyer’s knot, I judge so, my dear.”

## Folly

“You see, little Dandie will have heaps; and mine is such a pittance. I sometimes fancy I’d like to spend it.”

“You do pretty well with the income, I imagine,” chuckled the old lady.

“Oh, but one can’t be very extravagant on five hundred a year. If I wanted to do something big, like buying an air-ship, or an opera all to myself, or—or a laboratory, I couldn’t afford it, you see.”

“But why should you want a laboratory?” asked Mrs. Christie. “And if you do, you can always beg from Andrew.”

“That’s exactly what I can’t do in this case,” insisted Folly; but thereupon Susan returned, and Mrs. Christie was all for the game.

However, Susan first asked for a conference about some household matter; and Folly moved about from picture to picture, catching a word here and there, through the murmur of their voices. Once or twice she turned and opened her lips to speak, but no sound came.

When they were settling to the game, she did indeed summon resolution to ask, “Something gone wrong?”

But the old lady gave her no opportunity: “Nothing to trouble you about, my dear; I daresay it will right itself in the morning.”

Folly looked at her hard, then took up the cards and shuffled them. All at once, as she began to deal them out, it shot through her mind that she might shift the



## Folly

responsibility to the shoulders of chance or fate. All she had to do was to play fair; and the cards should tell her whether she must walk along the broad road of wifehood and motherhood, or seek him that she loved among the bypaths that the world eschewed. Dummy should decide the question once for all—she perceived the way. A game within a game, that should be it. Let the mater win and Susan, it was of no consequence; but she should play against Dummy, and all that he stood for, and of the two of them, who took most tricks should score as winner. She would stake all on this throw and have done with the torture of suspense; and she would play fair . . . fair. . . .

“What are you smiling about, child?” asked Mrs. Christie.

“My own nonsense, dear. Suppose—suppose Dummy were the devil himself?”

“Why, then, you’d get burnt fingers,” was the retort.

“I believe I could play with him,” she insisted.

“Well, well, we are waiting,” grumbled the old lady.

Folly was as conscious of a definite plunge as if she had dived into cold water. Dummy should be the devil, if he it was that tempted her to leave all that she had, for love’s sake; and she would play against him for husband and child. . . . It was an insane thing to do, she said to herself; and yet she swore that she would hold to the innings.

“Now we shall see what you make of the game, with all your cleverness,” said Mrs. Christie presently.

## Folly

“So we shall”— she was in grim earnest.

A little later, the old lady asked: “Why do you keep all your tricks apart from Dummy’s?”

“It’s a whim—a fancy,” she answered lightly; but followed every step of the game with a painful caution, and fever in her cheeks and eyes.

“Dummy has all the cards,” she said hoarsely after a time. “Look: ace, king, knave, ten—what show has the poor queen? It’s Dummy who’s winning this game, mater. I can’t do any better, can I?”

“Extraordinary!” said Mrs. Christie, studying the cards. “No, I don’t know that you can. But then it’s all the same, as you’re partners, my dear.”

And Folly smiled.

But soon her lips began to droop, for in the very next deal Susan made a brave show of trumps; and in the necessity of meeting these, Dummy lay, a crushed heap of low cards, swept away, time after time, by her own fighting-men. At the end of the second game, her heart was cold, for she—good, dutiful, pious Florence!—had thirty tricks and Dummy only seventeen.

By this she knew well enough which way her will was bent; but still she played fair.

In the rubber, Dummy, not allowed the slightest advantage, began nevertheless slowly to gain upon her. Folly’s heart beat to suffocation as she counted trick after trick to his credit. When he came abreast, she bit her lip to keep in a cry; and when he passed her, she trembled so that she could scarcely hold the cards.

## Folly

She was deaf to the triumph of materkin in winning the rubber; but her face wore the look of one who after long wandering in a labyrinth of blackness has come upon a sunny way of exit.

And she had played fair. Outwardly—yes; but she put her hands up to her burning face, with shame that all the while her heart and will had been with the Adversary.

She came to her senses with the discovery that she had risen; and that the two other women were staring at her in wonder. Suddenly she caught up a pack of cards and shook them over her head, so that they crowned her for a second and then trickled down to the floor, and lay scattered far and wide.

“I love cards!” she said, with a laugh that ended in a sob; and fled to her room to avoid explanation. She did not hear her mother-in-law’s murmured: “I shall look in upon her presently. The girl is beside herself to-night.”

Her shadowy room was peaceful in the firelight, with the soothing drip of rain from roof to balcony outside. She sat down on the hearth-rug, hugging her knees and shivering in the very breath of the flame. She was tired, now that the die was cast; and she was glad that there was no more thinking to be done. She had wronged materkin; she would wrong her husband and child. There was no room for conscience. Nothing remained to her but a year of Haldane’s life—no, months only—and afterward she must pay . . .

## Folly

Presently she began to walk the floor as she undressed; and then she was considering ways and means, and planning how she should find him, and what she should say. . . . She hated the ticking of the rain; it seemed to measure off the moments and so few were left to her—so few. Oh, why had she waited so long?

She flung her rings and brooches and watch carelessly upon the table; but caught them up and hid them, with the sudden thought that they might be turned into money, when money was so precious to the saving of a life.

Her fingers trembled and fumbled so that she could scarcely pull down her hair. She wished she had brought her maid, but remembered with a sudden thrill of joy that she would no longer have a maid, if she gave all her income to Haldane. And then, strangely enough, she played with her delicious hair, and dreamed her dreams, as if there were to be no sorrow in this sacrifice of all for a little. . . . Yet, she might have answered, it was the one thing, the one thing that she wanted in this world.

When at length she put out the light, she lay with her hands clasped under her head, staring at the fire until its last flicker died away. She was so absorbed that she did not hear a faint tapping at her door; and sat up in terror when a shaft of light shot across the ceiling, a shadow appeared, and the transparent trembling hand of materkin, shading a candle-flame.

## Folly

"Not asleep yet?" she chirruped. "I think you'd better tell me what's on your mind, lass."

"I shouldn't have finished by morning," laughed Folly. "It's sleep that I need now, mater—that's all."

The old lady came and stood by the bed, still shading her candle from the flushed face on the pillow.

"Better tell me," she insisted.

Then Folly raised herself on her elbow and said desperately: "It's money I want—and money—and money!"

"Is that all?" asked materkin. "Debts—eh? Extravagances? We can soon make that right. Don't want to ask Andrew—I see. Too proud. I feared it might be something more serious. Well—well—children! You shall have a cheque to-morrow—my free gift. It's a pity, now. I've mislaid thirty pounds somewhere in the house to-day. You might as well have had that too. . . ."

But Folly was sobbing in her pillow: "Don't, materkin, don't . . . I can't . . ."

"Oh, you hysterical women!" the old lady quite shut herself out from the class; but the scolding soon turned to pity: "Child—child, you are all a-tremble. Don't worry about it. We shall make it all right in the morning. Kiss me now and go to sleep. Good-night."

Folly drew the sweet old face close and held it long: "I can't let you go now without telling you."

But chance again blocked her way. "No," said

## Folly

materkin. "I won't listen to another word to-night. I've heard enough. I don't care what you've done or undone. You're a silly unstrung child! In the morning, when you have some sense, we may talk."

Folly looked after her, feeling suddenly the futility of protest. She had set her foot on the path, how could she turn back? And if she meant to sin hopelessly against them all, was it so much worse——?

"You'll stay in bed to-morrow?" asked Mrs. Christie.

"No, I must go up to town—I must indeed."

"I see—incurable!"

She waved her hand and closed the door, leaving the sinner in—well, perhaps, almost as much punishment as she deserved.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ON THE EDGE.

“As for Mr. Gregory,” said Mabel, a bit moodily, “he hasn’t returned yet, and I don’t know when he’s coming.”

“How do you know?” asked Folly.

“How do I know what I don’t know?” Mrs. Patrick laughed to cover her evasion.

“Mab,” said Folly, “are you engaged to him, or trying not to be?”

“Neither,” said Mrs. Patrick, with dignity. “We are good friends; but he is so Quixotic that I’m out of patience with him. Besides, he doesn’t write often.”

“Where is he then?”

“He was at Biarritz.”

“But what for? Of all the places——”

“Fine air—fine sea,” said Mabel succinctly.

“Do you think I could find him?”

“No doubt. My dear friend”—Mabel grew ironic—“is your adiposity (was it?) become so serious as all that?”

“Very likely,” was Folly’s strange answer. “And if I go, I shall be burning my ships behind me.”

## Folly

"I wouldn't go just yet, if I were you"—there was malice in Mabel's tone—"you'll be missing some one else."

"Who?" Folly's eyes anticipated the answer. "He's not in town?"

"He is, though. I met him in Cavendish Square yesterday."

"For how long?"

"Didn't ask."

"And stopping where?"

Mabel shrugged: "If you'd sent me word that you were coming. . . . But you like to jump on people."

Folly mused: "I daresay I could find him."

There was a pause, then Mabel said: "I'm losing all patience with you, Folly. You expect me to understand and sympathize; and you tell me nothing at all."

But Folly, busy with other thoughts, laughed: "It's a funny world. And Gregory in Biarritz."

At this Mabel gave her up: "I can't bother with you any longer. I leave you to your own devices. I'm due at the studio anyway."

"What's going on?" asked Folly, without interest.

"The *Disciples* are, to-night. They're going to give a play about souls and such-like things. They invited me to the rehearsal. They borrowed the studio because they couldn't afford a hall. Will you come?"

As Folly did not at once answer, she continued: "I mentioned it to your little poet-man. He may be there."



## Folly

"Don't call him that!" flashed from Folly.

"Well, I call a spade a spade," Mabel defended herself, "and he is all that, you know."

Folly hid her face in her hands. "I'll think about it. I haven't any clothes, you know."

"I told—Mr. Gore that he would find it amusing," continued Mabel, with a sidelong look at her friend. "They are going to dress symbolically, in gauze and peacock's feathers. That's what they want me for, to cast an artist's eye on the costumes. Bless them, I shall do that; and if they're not properly attired, I shall make a row. I think he'll be there. You've all afternoon to get up something. Sorry I'm too short to lend you any of my garments. You'll come?"

"I'll see," was as much as Folly would say.

When Mrs. Patrick returned, full of glee over the humours of the rehearsal, she found her friend in the same chair, in the same attitude.

"You've not budged!" she cried, disappointed.

"Oh, yes. I telephoned to Sloane Street. My dress is here. Come and see. I thought I'd be a 'soul' too, for once in my life."

"How sweet!" exclaimed Mabel, clasping her hands in ecstasy, "and how strange! What is it?"

"Fine spun wool," said Folly, lifting a fold of the fleecy skirt. "Andrew ordered it for me when we were up in Shetland several years ago. The woman got the idea and said she could make it; but it took her nearly three years, knitting most of the time. I haven't had

## Folly

it long; and I've never worn it. But I think it might suit this occasion, don't you?"

There was more meaning in her tone than Mabel chose to understand, so she took refuge in admiration: "It's finer than spun silk—finer than Valenciennes, or point d'Alencon or Limerick. I never saw anything so exquisite! And those bows of flame-coloured velvet on the shoulders and down the corsage and edging the flounce; and the girdle to match, and the nasturtiums for the hair! You'll look—I don't know how you'll look to-night, Folly!"

"Young again, I hope; I've been old so long."

"You're not"—Mab reached up to lay anxious hands on the tall friend's shoulders—"you're not in special need of me to-night?"

Folly chose to misunderstand: "For the bows, yes; and more especially for the nasturtiums. Let me see—perhaps I am symbolic, too. What shall I stand for? The woolly sheep touched with sacrificial fire—a burnt offering? How would that do?"

"I shall wear black," said Mabel soberly, as she released her, "and if you kill my faith in you, it shall be my mourning." She endeavoured to take a lighter tone: "And you mustn't do it, dear; for I can't rise to tragedy. I look far too comfortable—even in the blackest black."

Folly studied her toe as she moved it about on the fender: "If I should be happy to-night—I mean, by any chance—I have earned it. I have come through hell to get here."

## Folly

“There you go again,”—Mabel’s despair was comic. “I can’t follow you. You’ll drive me distracted with your allegories! Why can’t you talk the King’s English?”

“Shall I?” asked Folly, looking straight at her.

“Well, I’m sure I prefer it. And you needn’t make me feel a criminal by staring at me that way. What are you up to? I believe I ought to telephone for your husband or a keeper.”

“I can’t quite tell you what I’m up to,” said Folly slowly, “because it all rests on the knees of the Fates. I can’t peer into the future. But I’ve planned, and I’ve schemed, and I’ve sinned—in a way you wouldn’t believe—and I’m going to take my roses now. To-morrow”—she would not put into words the thought that they would be withered, but turned aside with the question—“who was it said *Carpe diem*?”

“Horace, I believe.”

“Yes. He was an old sinner, too, wasn’t he? But he had a good time and people liked him none the worse for it then; nor, for that matter, do they now. I’ve been starving, but there are roses still . . . *voilà!* How like you my hair?”

“I have yet to learn that roses satisfy hunger,” objected Mabel. “I should advise plain bread—and Andrew gives you plenty. Your hair? Are you trying to look like a Madonna?”

“Is it wrong? It’s another side of me, you know. I want to be different—this one night.”

## Folly

Mabel reflected, then said deliberately: "I suppose that means you are going in for a love scene with Haldane Gore."

Folly looked at her with flaming cheeks: "I have not deserved this from you, Mabel."

"I think you have," said Mrs. Patrick slowly. "Oh, yes, I almost think you have. If it is true, may you be forgiven, for you are setting about it deliberately!"

"You are not so far from the truth," answered Folly, in a soft undertone, "yet far enough; for, of course, you could not know . . . . But it's no use talking. We should only lose our tempers. You will just have to wait. And what I do, I stand by."

Then Mabel was seized with a sudden panic: "Tell me, Folly, tell me before it is too late! I wish we weren't going; I wish I hadn't met him; I wish——"

"He may not come," said Folly, still softly.

"You don't believe that."

"It does not matter whether he comes or not. Oh, yes, I am speaking the truth. There are ways and ways. . . ."

"Promise me one thing," began Mabel.

But Folly seized her and began an improvised dance-step to the burden of a song that Mabel had never heard before:

"Plait, plait, the withes of the waving willow tree."

"Promise me"—Mabel was losing her breath.

"So I weave at my baskets—weave—weave—

And with love flown away, still I grieve and grieve——"

## Folly

Mabel jerked herself free: "Where did you get that?"

"There's another stanza," said Folly, "and that's better.

"'So I braid at my baskets—braid—braid—  
And with love in my heart I am all unafraid——'"

"Is it one of his?" asked Mrs. Patrick.

"Plait, plait the withes of the waving willow tree,"

sang Folly.

"I asked you to promise——"

Folly was walking before the long glass, watching the sweep of her train; but she turned now, no longer attempting evasion: "Well, what? What shall I promise?"

"Not to be rash," pleaded Mabel. "Come to me first."

"If I am rash, I am rash," said Folly, "for what is to be is all written in the stars. Shall I pass?"

"*Ora pro nobis*," sighed Mabel. "I can do nothing with you."

Then Folly began another dance-step of her own, and whirled her white cloud backwards and forwards through the room:

"Plait, plait the withes——"

We all die, Mab; and I sometimes think a short life and a merry . . . . Are you ready? Don't tell me we've nearly an hour to wait! What have you got from Mudie's?"

## CHAPTER X.

### A PLAY OF SOULS.

IN proper time the play of souls came on; and while the disembodied spirits drifted yearningly and philosophically across the stage, Folly smiled upon them, and applauded as if she had no other interest or care in the world.

Between the acts she herself became a little centre of attraction; and Bob Crandall, watching from a distance, grinned and muttered: "Moths and the flame! Alas, poor Mabel!"

Folly laughed and chattered, and gave no outward sign of the heart-leaps with which she beheld each fresh face at the door. She had been quite honest when she told Mabel that it did not matter whether he came this night; her mind was fully made up. But nevertheless, she feared to meet his eyes; for she knew that in a moment, before she could catch her breath, they would tell her what she needed to learn.

She was overcome by a sudden impatience of the endlessly chanting fools on the stage, bit her lip, and had to keep it sucked in to conceal the blood.

After a while Crandall went up to her, flattered in

## Folly

spite of himself by her pretty interest in his analysis of his own mental vacillations, as to whether it was worth while to bestow his presence upon the play. He surprised himself by concluding with a rout of compliments.

"I'll make Gore savage," he chuckled maliciously.

"Yes?" Her tone was sufficiently indifferent; he could not have guessed that his vapid talk was become suddenly pregnant. "He is in town?"

"Left him at the club, glum as a parson over *Punch*. I worried him to come and support me, but he fairly jeered me out of the room."

"I've not seen him for a long time," she said. "Has he been back long?"

"Only a day or two. Some business or other. Going abroad again at once, he tells me. I say, do you suppose it's a Great Work, or what? He's a perfect will-o'-the-wisp—and mute as an oyster. I couldn't get a word out of him as to what mischief he's up to."

"Oh?" she said indifferently.

Then he spoke of the dancing, and demanded her card; and she gave it to him. There was a hush of voices and a settling of draperies as the curtain-bell rang; and Folly, whose eyes had been wandering again, got swiftly to her feet, with a gesture to Mrs. Patrick and a word to the amazed Crandall, and made her way to the door. In the sudden darkness that followed the lowering of the lights, she held out her arms blindly.

Neither knew how long it was that they had been

## Folly

standing with clasped hands in the dim hall, while the past faded into an evil dream, and the future was forgotten, before the present grew too tense, and she said:

“People may be coming out. We can go into Mab’s study. That isn’t being used to-night.”

She seemed to be impelled to talk all the while: “She scribbles there when she isn’t inspired to paint. She’d do either better if she let the other alone, wouldn’t she? It isn’t locked, I know. Yes, this door. We can be quiet here for a few moments—do you mind?”

“Don’t be silly!” he admonished her; and her only sense was a wild prayer of thankfulness that the old voice was as yet unchanged.

The little room was dark, and Gore groped for the matches, by the faint light that came through the half-open door: “Do you know where she keeps them?”

“No, nor does she, except when the maid’s just been tidying. Let me have a try.”

She put out her hand to the wall, but found him instead; and in a flash the barriers were gone. But she drew away at once, stumbling against Mabel’s chair; then sank into it with her hands before her face, as if she feared that even in the dark its tale might be read.

He closed the door softly, then felt his way to the chair, and leaning across its back drew her hands away and held them fast, with his face close against hers: “Well?”

“Why didn’t you write to me all these months?”



## Folly

"How could I dream that you wanted to hear?"

"But I said . . . and you promised. . . ."

"I think not—if you remember," he answered quietly. "I never intended to do so. I had done with you, then—or rather, I thought you had done with me. I took it you feigned a polite interest. I did not want to write symptoms—there's no fun in symptoms."

She struggled to control her voice as she asked: "You are—a little—better?"

"Not much"—he seemed amused.

"No worse?"

"Not much"—he hesitated.

"I knew nothing. I could not help. Can you believe that it has been killing me?"

There was a silence before he said: "It is so new to think that you care at all. I had got used to—the other. Poor little Folly——"

"Yes, poor Folly," she repeated. "And what are you going to do?"

He would have kissed her then, but she withdrew her hands, crying with a sort of desperation, "Oh, we must find the matches and talk it over—talk it over—"

And presently her sleeve knocked the box to the floor; and he found it and lighted and adjusted the gas reading-lamp. All the while she sat with lowered eyelids, as if she were unwilling or afraid to look at him. He divined her thought and laughed, saying: "I'm not so changed that you need mind."

## Folly

Then she took courage and raised her eyes; and when she saw that he was indeed the same, only rather pinched about the nose, and with deeper hollows in the temples, she dropped back into Mabel's chair with a sigh.

He remained standing by the desk. "Well, what's to talk over?" he asked, rather brusquely.

"Me," she began; and then, as if to gain time, added hurriedly: "Bob Crandall said you weren't coming."

"Somebody dropped in at the club and told me you were here. So I reflected for a while—which makes the matter rather worse—and then I came. Now you have the truth."

"What are you doing—for it?"

He followed her turn of thought: "Nothing. Hanging about. Gregory's doing."

"Is he—was he—with you, then?"

"Dragged me off to Biarritz. Said it was a cheerful place, and he wanted a rest, anyway. Experiments on me now and then. He's got a kitchen and a zoo there; and occasionally he takes a few days off and runs up to Paris. I don't try to follow his messing about" . . . he seemed to muse.

"Yes? Yes? It's good to know he's with you," she said eagerly.

"I didn't want him to come. I was for going away alone, but I couldn't shake him off—stuck like a leech."

## Folly

“Yes, yes; then all this time hasn’t been wasted. Oh, I am thankful for that! Do you know, I came up now because I couldn’t bear it any longer—to consult him—to ask him——”

“You’re not ill?” he jerked out.

“No, to ask him—to ask him—to put aside his practice—and do—what he is doing.”

“And who was to pay?” he demanded bluntly.

“I was. I could have offered him nearly five hundred a year. It’s nothing, but it’s all I have. . . . I have tried and tried to think how I could get more. But I believed that perhaps he might—being your friend——”

He had no word of thanks, but came and knelt by her chair; and she smiled upon him.

“He sent me over now to see Mortimer and get his opinion. He thinks he’s on the track of something. He won’t say a word; but I know by the glint in his eye. It’s extraordinary what fools your clever men are sometimes. . . . Oh, I gave up hoping long ago—too much trouble—the present’s good enough. And I should have packed him back to his business, only, you know, he’s so jolly well pleased with his poor little beasties and messes . . . I hate to throw cold water. . . . And besides, ninety-nine fellows fail, and the hundredth man gets it. . . .”

“You do hope!” she cried passionately. “Ah—hope!”

He smiled at her: “I wish I could paint you now: an

## Folly

angel crowned and touched with the flames and flowers of life. If I had the brush of Sargent, I could make my fortune. It's a new idea—the angel Folly——”

“Among the lost,” she whispered, and dropped head and arms together on her knees, with a sudden sob.

He went away from her then, and toyed with a paper-knife on the table, pale with the sense that his resolution was slipping from him fast, though he clung to it as a drowning man to a rope that is being slowly drawn away from his failing strength.

“Hal, will you take that money?”

He smiled a negative: “What for?”

“It might help. Gregory might be able to do more——”

“Nonsense!”

“Mortimer then——”

“I've seen him. He knows it's all bally rot. I shall have to tell Greg when I get back. But he'll probably stick to his idea all the same; he's as obstinate as a pig.”

“There may be something in it,” she pleaded.

“There won't be your money in it—not while I am alive,” he asserted vigorously.

“Not if——” the words refused to come; but he read them in her face.

“Don't say it, Folly.”

“Why, it's been waiting for months to be said.” But she was almost choked by her heart-beats before she got it out: “Not if I come, too?”

## Folly

He walked away to the window: "Ah, that needs consideration. But I thought we had threshed it all out in April?"

She shook her head. "The case is quite different now."

"How different?"

"Well, it's that I am different, then. Your need is greater than—theirs."

"You think so?" His tone sounded cold.

"Ah, Hal, don't consider"—she held out her hands. "I've tried all I could, and I'm done. Just take me away somewhere."

"Your husband?" he asked, returning to the paper-knife, and studying it as if it were a great curiosity.

"He has had his chance."

"And the boy?"

"He doesn't need me so much now; he will need me still less. Other women with children have done the same. . . ."

"Are you excusing yourself?" he asked, speaking harshly, but with no harshness in his eyes.

She looked straight before her without answering.

"People—your friends—the world?"

She shrugged.

"Is there no one——?"

"One—one!" she cried; and then, in sudden fear: "Hal, I begin to doubt you!"

He came and stood looking down upon her then: "You need never do that. But I am thinking for

## Folly

you. It's so much to lose—and for such a short time.”

“To-day—and to-day—and to-day,” she answered, smiling upon her finger-tips; but while he was wondering how she had arrived at this philosophy of his, she was overcome by fright again, and clutched his arm, whispering: “How long?”

“I don't know any more than I knew in April; but not long compared with a life-time—with yours.”

She leaned back in her chair, with a low laugh: “But need mine be so long?”

He studied her before he answered: “In common decency it must go on to its natural limits.”

“And do you see me old?” she still defied him.

“I have known old women—decayed, toothless, hollow, hairless, patched and coloured—and unrespected; and if you come with me now——”

“I shall be like that? It's a pleasing picture. But my flame will have burned out long before.”

“You don't know what you're talking about!” he said, with sudden anger. “Love burns down, and joy and hope; but the embers of life go on and on, even when they are smothered in ash. How then?”

“I'm willing to pay, if you are.” She did not flinch.

At this, something gave way in his resolve, and he went again to lean over her chair.

“I willing?” he said. “God knows how you tempt me. But you? I'm not willing you should pay, because you don't know the cost. I should be a brute if I let you come, Folly.”

## Folly

She rose, trembling, and clinging to her chair: "And what should I be—if I come?"

"Only Folly—only dear Folly," he said, with a brave show of gentle amusement.

She sank back again and strove to grasp the situation: "I don't understand you. You have changed. I suppose it's your illness. You mean, that you want me to go back—home?"

He nodded slightly.

"That you won't take my money? That you want me to wait—and wait—and wait—until you die?"

"If you were with me," he began, then changed the form of his sentence: "For one thing, I want to spare you a—" he hesitated—"a damned ugly sight."

"But Gregory—haven't I as much right——?"

"It's Gregory's profession."

"Not in this case—oh, not in this case; he's your friend, while I. . . ." She controlled her voice and went on: "I can see plainly enough that you have changed. You have slipped away from me—there's a veil between us—and you don't need me now."

He returned yet again to the paper-knife, in an obstinate silence.

"Do you?" she pleaded.

"No," he answered, without looking at her.

"I should be only in the way?"

"Yes." He tossed the fragments of the paper-knife from him.

There was a silence until she said presently, in her

## Folly

old light manner: "We're missing the best of the play, talking nonsense here. Shall we go back?"

He assented with a nod. She rose, shivering a little, and glanced about the room as if uncertain what she ought to do or say next.

"Perhaps you'd better put out the light," she suggested, as he did not move.

"I will, soon."

She tried to summon her wits, one hand gathering in her trailing skirt, the other moving restlessly from forehead to throat and back again. "So it is the end?" she asked at length.

And when he could not look at her or answer, she drew near, and clasped white pleading hands against his breast. Her voice, sweeter and more penetrating in its grief, breathed upon him: "Have I lost every-thing with you, then? Can I no longer tempt you?"

He could only seize the hands to keep her away, as he stumbled for words: "My loss—my loss. But you'll be happy yet."

With that she left him; but when she reached the door, laid her face against the panel, as if she could go no further: "I don't know what's to happen now, since you won't —have me."

He cursed his own feebleness that could find nothing better to say than: "It's rough on us both, girl; but you'll see it through."

"I? So Mab said. But you? Ah, you have gone



## Folly

millions of miles away from me already—so it doesn't matter. . . .”

He put his arm about her then, thinking she would fall; but she withdrew at once, conscious of the impalpable barrier between them. Then suddenly her courage came back in a wave, and she towered above him magnificently: “I'm sorry I've been such a fool. I haven't escaped the common lot of women; but I trust I've learned my lesson. Please forget to-night. . . . Good-bye.”

He was whiter than she, as they clung to each other's hands in silence; then he opened the door for her, and she went away without looking back.

As she stood at the studio door, she was aware of the subdued clapping of hands and polite bravos: the play of souls was done.

## CHAPTER XI.

### LIFE FOR LIFE.

So Haldane Gore was not seen at the play after all; but Mrs. Christie stayed on, drank coffee, and danced, and discussed the action with much friendly eulogy of acts and actors.

Mabel's eyebrows were disapproving, and once or twice she suggested that Folly go home.

"Shall I retreat?" said Folly, laughing. "Do you want to do me out of my dances? It's a funny thing, Mab. I'm haunted by an old tale that I've read somewhere—I can't remember the name of it or how it went; but there was a knight who rode under a portcullis, and this fell upon his horse, and left him inside with the one half, and the other half outside. . . ."

"Well?" asked Mabel uneasily.

"Can you think how the horse felt?"

"I'm sure you'd better go home; you're overtired."

"But I told you this was my one night, and I intended to be happy; and it's not half done yet."

Mabel believed that she understood dimly something of what had happened; but before she could speak Crandall came up with his programme.

## Folly

So Folly danced and smiled, and knew by the faces of the men about her that she was quite as charming as in the old days before she married Andrew. She danced with any one who laid claim to a number, and could not tell afterwards who had been her partners. She talked as in a dream, wondering now and then that what she said should pass as not unreasonable.

She had no idea of the time, when she was awakened into full consciousness by a crash. She seemed to have been dancing with Crandall again, for he was standing with her by a window, and one of them must have knocked over the flower-pot that lay in fragments at their feet. Between them and the light, against a background of whirling figures, stood Mabel, and Mabel was saying:

“Folly, Andrew is in the study; he wants to see you.”

“Oh, not there!” flashed to Folly’s lips; but she could not tell whether she had spoken the words or not.

“What does he want?” she asked, turning away from Crandall.

“Go and see. Don’t be frightened,” said Mabel pityingly.

So she passed in and out among the dancers, and found her husband standing by the green-shaded light in the little room where she had looked her last upon Haldane Gore.

She faced him in silence, twisting her handkerchief

## Folly

between her fingers, wondering if by any chance the two men had met.

"I think we'll go home by the midnight train," said he gently.

She awaited the explanation, which came at once: "The little chap's been taken rather bad."

"Dead?" was all she could say.

"Nonsense!" He affected cheerfulness.

She thrust the green shade up so as to throw a strong light on his face: "You're not deceiving me?"

He met her eyes squarely: "No, I left him better. But there's no time to lose, or we shall miss the train. Get your cloak. Mab understands."

Afterwards she fell back again into her dream: there was a long stairway, a room full of cloaks, and a nightmare of a struggle to make a woman understand which was hers, when she had lost her check for it and could not remember its colour. But at length she was in a swift-pattering cab, with the wind streaming against her face, and the double line of lights down the street turning into streaks that ran to meet each other far away where there was a great congregation of coloured lamps. . . . Somebody was with her in the cab, talking of telegrams. To her amazement, she found that it was her husband, and wondered why he was there, and where they were going.

"You didn't get any of them?" he was saying.

She shook her head.

"You shouldn't have run away like that," he expos-

## Folly

tulated. "As much mystery as if you had been going to elope. I tried to reach you through the mater first, then at Sloane Street; and by the time I remembered that Mabel was at home, I suppose you had gone out. But I found there was an express, and I wasn't any good at Sunlands anyway, so I thought the best plan was for me to come and fetch you. We shall just do it, I think."

"You haven't told me what——?"

"Croup," said he.

She shivered, and he put up the glass. But she had turned cold at the memory of something his mother had said.

"It's nothing to worry about," he tried to comfort her. "I used to get it often when I was a little chap."

"I know."

"The mater used to sit up nights with me——"

"Oh, don't!"—he touched conscience there. "Was it Jenny's fault?"

"I don't think so—pure accident. They were caught in a shower, you see. It might have happened any day."

She understood well enough that he was excusing her absence to herself; but remorse cried out: "I shouldn't have let them go, if I had been at home—oh, I shouldn't!"

"Now you are blaming me," he said, to turn her thoughts, although he knew very well that it was herself she was scourging.

## Folly

He went on to explain in a matter-of-fact way what he had done, and how his mother had sent Susan on by the first train. She felt an unreasonable pang of jealousy that Susan should be in her place; but she was a little comforted too.

She did not speak again until they were alone in their compartment: "People don't die so quickly, Andrew?"

But he only said: "Not often. We must hope."

The train was well out of the suburbs before she said: "If it did happen, I should know it was a judgment from God."

He looked at her keenly from under his shabby cap; but he neither stirred nor spoke.

Presently she moved a little closer: "Andrew, I think now I ought to tell you everything."

She was somewhat daunted by his cool: "As you like."

"Don't you want to know?" she demanded.

He meditated a moment, then: "What I want to know I find out for myself. What you wish to tell is another matter altogether."

She looked at him in wonder. Was he so dense as she had supposed? How much did he know or guess? And did he think or suspect that this confession was a voluntary act of penance—a peace-offering to God?

"It's this way," she said, with an effort at self-possession. "To-night I had a balance in my hands, whether to stay or go. I thought I could choose; but the one way was barred to me, and now the other——"

## Folly

He did not commit himself as to how much meaning he got out of this tangled speech.

“Did you know that—that Haldane Gore is dying?”

“No,” said he.

“You know that I—that we——”

He did not wince: “I knew that.”

“Then you know that we did our best——” She closed her eyes against the persistent vision of a little child fighting for breath. “You know that we have always tried to do what was right.”

“I know,” said he more quickly.

“Until to-night. To-night I had made up my mind to drop everything and go away with him. . . .”

He turned abruptly from her and stared at the blank window, not seeing that it reflected his own grim face and her drooping head.

“Well,” said he harshly, “why didn’t you?”

“He would not have me,” she answered steadily.

It was a long time before he asked: “Do you know why?”

“It comes to me now,” she said. “At first I thought he had changed; but when I remember all that he said, and how he looked, I know that he was only holding both of us to our duty.”

“Why do you tell me all this?” he demanded.

“I have already explained. I’ll make it clearer. It’s a bargain, I tell you, with God—with the powers that rule earth and heaven. If the baby is spared, I shall take it as a sign. . . . I shall know my way. If not . . .”

## Folly

"I understand," said he. "This is a warning to me. You are gambling again; but you don't quite know the stakes you are playing for."

She turned her passionate eyes upon him: "I will not lose them both!"

He looked at her steadily and she interpreted his glance to mean: "And where do I come in?"

"You go to the wall," said she, "but you've had your chance."

"It seems, then," said he slowly, "that you are prepared to throw me over, at any moment, for this man who may, or may not want you——"

"I have no doubt in the world!" she cried. "But I should make sure—oh, very sure, before I——"

"Dropped me—eh? Well, there's sense in that," he said bitterly. "And I am to owe whatever favour I get from you in the future to the continued existence of my son? Is that it? Sounds rather odd."

"You are to pity me—and him—and all of us," she whispered, "because you are strong."

She moved nearer and laid her tired head on his shoulder. He neither repulsed her, nor drew her to him; but after a moment, seized her hand that was toying with the clasp of her cloak—seized it and held it fast, chafing it and stroking it, in a sort of gentle pity.

The carriage was waiting for them at the station; and the coachman leaned forward at once, with a reassuring message from the doctor.

They drove in silence until they turned in through



## Folly

the gateway at Sunlands; then Folly said, more to herself than to him: "I knew it could not happen before I got home."

In the empty brightly-lighted hall, she unclasped her cloak as if strangled by the weight of it. Then she turned to him, white enough under the radiance of her hair; and he found occasion to wonder that he understood her appealing glance.

"I'll go up and see," he answered, as if she had spoken.

But she shook her head, and her resolution sprang forth full-grown.

"No," she said, tossing him her cloak, "I shall go. That is mine to do—everything is mine. I shall try to be like—your mother."

She ran up the stairway, and he heard her softly open and close the nursery door; and the little wail that began in the interval, assured him that all was still well.

He stood looking down at the empty cloak that he carried on his arm. It was in some measure a symbol of his marriage.

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE KEEPING OF THE BARGAIN.

NOVEMBER at Sunlands is as little dreary as that month of fogs can be in England, for there is nearly always a good breeze blowing off the Downs, and the house turns its windows to every ray of sunshine. Usually Christie was more than content with his inheritance in this time of blazing logs, when a man could give his time to his collections, and the new books and journals; but in this strange year of his life he wasted many hours in lonely fireside ponderings over questions of duty and conduct. It was seriously unlike himself to carry through trains of conjecture, as: "If so-and-so happened, I should," etc., or "In such and such a case," etc. But by the time that he was relieved of immediate anxiety concerning the child's health, he found that the habit had become invincible.

He had no doubt from the first that Folly intended to hold to her bargain with Providence: her child's life over against her lover's. Horrible as the idea was, it furnished him with grotesque amusement; no one but Folly could have devised it.

## Folly

Meanwhile, she made a slave of herself to the baby, relegating the nurse to the humble post of waiting attendant. Her devotion would have been funny if it had not been rendered touching by the grim tragedy behind it. She was practical, too, in her fighting spirit; for upon learning from the doctor that attacks similar to the first were to be expected, she surrounded herself with all possible appliances, and learned by rote the things to be done in case of emergency. To a stranger watching, it would have seemed that her child was the most precious thing on earth to her; but her husband sometimes wondered whether in fighting for its life, she realized also a battle for honour against passion in her soul.

They were bound to meet often during these days; and at first, upon each occasion, both were conscious of awkwardness and discomfort. It was not possible to allude to her wild confession the night he brought her from town; but each read the memory of it in the other's eyes.

And yet, when she had recovered a little from the shock, Folly in the nursery was a picture quaint and pretty enough to distract any man from estate business and local politics, riding, newspapers and correspondence with learned bodies. Unforbidden, Christie found it extremely pleasant to look in, many times a day, to discuss steam-kettles, the vagaries of a thermometer, the pros and cons of glycerine soap, and the symptoms of teething. And when there was nothing more to be

## Folly

said, he often stood, shifting his weight like a school-boy, studying the two by the fire.

He could not tell whether he liked them best with small Dandie making tangles in his mother's hair, or asleep in the cradle with her foot on the rocker and her hands busy with Shetland wool. She went on making an endless store of tiny socks and jackets and shirts; and it crossed his mind once or twice that she looked upon this array of things as in some sense a pledge—from whom, who might say?—that he would live to wear them all. From the look of her face it seemed sometimes as if she were knitting all her hopes and dreams into the intricate stitches, as if to hold those fragile blessings safe there for all time.

One day he stumbled upon them at the time of the bath, and broke out in a boyish exclamation:

“I say! You ought to be painted like that, you know.”

“Quick, the screen,” she chid him. “Don't come too near; you're just in from the cold air.”

She knelt by the bath on the hearth-rug, enveloped in a vast blue pinafore, with the nurse looking on, half superior, and half indignant at being deprived of office. Between her own clumsiness with the sponge and the baby's wilful splashing, she was much spotted with water, and her hair hung in damp tendrils about her flushed face. Nevertheless, she was laughing a response to young Dandie's liberal display of his six teeth, and crooning love-words to his gurgles of triumph

## Folly

in having made her so wet; and the man looking on, could scarcely believe that she was the pale passionate woman who, only a few days before, had been willing to abandon all this at the call of a stranger. Was it acting, he asked himself, or the pride of a spirit that held itself rigidly to a self-imposed contract? He could not tell.

One thing he noticed, that much as she cuddled the baby, talked and crooned and laughed over him, she never sang any of the old lullabies that he had learned to listen for in the early spring. Hesitatingly he asked her one day. She shook her head.

“That would be too much. It has cost dear enough to do what I do.”

He rarely blazed as he did then; and yet first he stood some seconds before her, restraining speech until he could master his words: “We don’t want you here—Dandie and I—if you regret——”

Again she shook her head with a glance at the child that lay crowing on her knee:

“I don’t regret. It was a fair bargain. But you ask me to sing.”

He laughed: “I think I’ll go back to my cottage improvements.” And he strode downstairs, wondering if many men were so perplexed, so harassed, in the devious ways of married life.

But she went to the door and called him back: “Andrew, will you see to it that the telephone is never out of order?”

## Folly

"What? There's nothing wrong with it—never has been."

"Then keep it so," she insisted. "We mustn't take any chances."

"You borrow trouble," he said more kindly. "You'll be distracted when he comes to whooping-cough."

"I have everything else ready," she pursued, "but I just remembered the telephone. They do go wrong sometimes. . . . There's no reason why he shouldn't grow up perfectly healthy."

"He'll live to be eighty," Christie agreed heartily. "But you've got to expect croup and the like."

She turned her head suddenly and went back into the nursery. He followed and found her bent over the cradle, listening to the child's breathing. Presently she looked up and smiled, perhaps touched by his expression:

"It's all right. I'm a bit nervous." She held out her hand to him: "You're the best man in the world, Andrew—St. Andrew! You ought never to have been afflicted with a Folly. What could you expect?"

"He could not have expected a more devoted mother," said he, keeping her hand.

"Ah, materkin?"—she flushed faintly. "If I were half as good——"

"You're holding your own," was as much as he thought it wise to suggest.

They came no nearer to an understanding; but even this was enough to show them that patched-up lives are

## Folly

not intolerable. He clung to the secret hope that the boy would yet bring them together.

On an afternoon late in the month, with the sun shining clearly between the bare branches, Folly from the window saw her husband riding away down the avenue. She wondered where he was going, and was faintly vexed that he did not glance up toward the nursery. Then she thought about him for a while, and pondered whether he might be lonely now that her life was so utterly absorbed in the duties of motherhood. Yet she knew that she dared not relax—not for a moment—lest that other grief should catch her in its claws again. . . .

She fixed her attention upon tracing out the curves and crooks of the branches, upon the homily of a squirrel over an acorn, upon the degree of purple in the Downs—upon various incidents and details of the landscape before her, that might keep her thoughts away from the Forbidden Country.

There came a sudden chill of twilight as the sun dropped into a cloud; and with it a stir within the room, and the rasping choke that she dreaded and yet listened to hear.

Instantly her finger was on the bell, and before the frightened nurse came running, she had lighted a spirit-lamp and flung a blanket on the fender to be heated. There was no time for fear or hesitation; all her powers rushed into action. She hurried one maid to telephone for the doctor, another to fill the hot bath, a third

## Folly

to send a groom to try to find her husband. She herself, with swift strong fingers that neither trembled nor fumbled, had unswathed the gasping little body by the time that the hot water was ready.

She worked, and her mind remembered as she worked; she thought of all things possible and did them. And when the maids huddled together, aimless and weeping, she sent them away, all but the nurse; and dry-eyed went through the whole process that she had so often rehearsed in anticipation.

She watched the struggle for breath, the little fists beating the air, the blackening of the face; and with grim lips never once relaxed her efforts until the child grew still.

Then, as the nurse offered a fresh hot blanket, she pushed it away and turned her back; so sat until the doctor came in. And Jenny was afraid to move or speak.

He was a grave silent man, and crossed over to her without a word. She looked up, and they understood each other.

He was brief in his examination; and when he would have taken the child from her arms, she drew the blanket close: "Not yet. I knew when it happened; I did all I could."

He asked a few brief questions and she answered; then turned to him sharply:

"If you had come sooner——"

"Who can annihilate space?" he said. "But there



## Folly

was nothing else to do. These attacks are sometimes irresistible."

"In half an hour or less,"—she seemed to be thinking aloud.

"Less—much less—often," he said.

They heard the grating of a key, and the opening and closing of a door below.

"My husband"—she was still quiet. "I must go tell him."

"Let me"—he began, but she shook her head, and rose and laid the child in its cradle; then she left the doctor with the sobbing nurse, and went downstairs alone.

She found Christie glancing over a pile of letters on his desk.

"Did you meet Cobb?" she asked.

He turned to look at her and saw what had happened.

"Yes," she whispered. "You cannot blame me."

He would have taken her into his arms, but she held him off with hard fingers: "I must go upstairs again. They will tell me what to do. Nobody shall touch him but myself."

Not a single moment could he keep her; nor had she a pitying glance for his grief.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE BREAK.

SHE did not shrink from all there was to do; and when it was finished, sat, neither weeping nor complaining, with her arms about the cradle. She would not move to eat or sleep until her husband came and fetched her, neither speaking nor requiring speech, but insisting, in a manner that left no room for choice, that she hold to the ordinary functions of life.

She was grateful to him for not troubling her with sympathy, and for arranging that they should have none of the pomps and paraphernalia of funerals. They went alone—they two—and he let her hold the child in her arms all the way.

They came back through a drizzling rain and found Mrs. Patrick in the lower hall.

“Yes, I sent for her,” Christie confessed.

Folly looked at her as if she had been a stranger, then crossed over to stare into the blazing logs.

There seemed an unnatural stillness in the house that hushed Mabel’s voice: “Andrew, I have been interfering in your affairs. One of the maids was telling

## Folly

me this morning that those Hunters in the village are in trouble. The boy has sprained his ankle in a trap—poaching, I suppose—and the old people are helpless with rheumatism . . . and there's no one to earn a penny. . . .”

“I'll ride over and see what can be done,” he said, looking at his wife.

“And then you'll come up and tell us about our poor neighbours,” said Mab, slipping an arm through Folly's.

The afternoon wore away in rain and mist; and Mabel, her fingers busy with lace-work, talked on and on, telling stories of suffering, and sacrifice, and help in trouble; and contented herself with monosyllables or silent rebuffs.

Finally she tossed her braids and pattern on the table: “This must come to an end, you know.”

“It has come to an end,” said Folly quietly.

“You must rouse yourself.”

“Yes.”

“I don't want to think you selfish.”

“I am selfish. I always was.”

“That's no reason why you should continue to be.”

Folly shrugged.

“My dear girl, you are not the only one in the world who has suffered. For heaven's sake, think of other people!”

Then she saw that she had blundered, as Folly said: “I am thinking of one other.”

## Folly

“There—there—there”—Mab spoke impatiently—  
“I always put my foot into it. But I’ll be blunt now. You should be thinking of one other—and that’s your husband.”

Folly smiled: “You do not know about the compact, you see; Andrew does. I offered to go with Haldane—that night at the play. He would not have me. I need not tell you why. Then Andrew came for me—you know how; and I said that if baby were spared, I should hang on here; if not——”

Mrs. Patrick was pale as she seized Folly’s hands: “You were mad. You cannot reason like that. It’s the twentieth century.”

“If not,” continued Folly, “I said that nothing else should keep us apart—if he needed me and wanted me. . . .”

“And you say Andrew knows?” Mabel was incredulous.

Folly nodded.

“And what does he think?”

“He never said. I don’t read his thoughts.”

“Oh, my dear, my dear, you don’t know what you are saying! Have you considered well?”

“The only point that needs consideration now,” answered Folly, “is whether Haldane would be the better for my going.”

“There, you see, you have doubts yourself,” urged Mabel.

“Perhaps,” said Folly, and added, with sudden

## Folly

energy: "But you must help me there. What do you hear from Gregory?"

Mabel was silent, taken aback by the suddenness of the demand.

"It doesn't matter, if you won't speak; I can always go to Biarritz myself."

"They are no longer at Biarritz," slipped from Mabel.

"Where then?"

"Do you think I shall encourage you in your madness?"

"It's all the same. I shall do without you. But you shall tell me one thing: how is he?"

"You hurt me, Folly—please, my wrists! He is much the same, I believe."

"And that hope—that hope of Gregory's . . .?"

"There is so little time, you see," said Mabel pityingly.

"Ah, that is it—so little time. I must waste none. And you won't tell me where he is? Surely, Gregory can't stay away much longer; and then he'll need somebody. . . . I can read it in your face: Gregory talks of coming home, or Haldane won't let him stop on . . . and he will be alone. . . ."

"Perhaps—" began Mabel.

"I was deceived at first," Folly interrupted. "My pride, I suppose. I thought he had changed. . . . But afterwards, I understood: it was as hard for him as for me . . . I shall not wait now. I shall go at once. I shall find out . . . I can at least be there. I can

## Folly

watch from a distance; and when he needs me. . . .  
He will need me. . . .”

“You are deliberately cutting yourself off from the past?” said Mabel.

“From you?” asked Folly keenly.

“No, I don’t count. You know I shall always be the same; but people . . .”

“People!” was the scornful echo. “Mabel, he is dying, and I am here.”

“May I speak to Andrew?” asked Mrs. Patrick suddenly.

“If you like,” said Folly. “He knows all you can say.”

Mabel waited no longer, but went down to the study, where she found Christie, returned from his errand, seemingly idle. At least, she could not perceive that he had been working or reading.

“I arranged what I could for those people,” he began; but paused, perceiving that she had some definite thing to say.

“Do you know her latest mad plan?” she asked abruptly.

“Well, yes”—he arranged loose sheets of paper on his desk—“I suppose so.”

“Surely you will stop her?” she cried, in a breath.

“What good would that be?” he demanded.

“Her name and yours”—said Mabel faintly.

“Of course. Well, I don’t know what more you would have me do? Lock her up? Set a watch-dog?”

## Folly

She would probably escape if she were bent on it; and then the scandal would be worse. However, that's not to the point. My attitude isn't the common one, perhaps, but it's this: what isn't mine in fact I won't have in form."

It was a long speech for Christie to make. Mabel was astonished and almost frightened to hear that he was so far from insisting on his legal claim.

"And is there no way out?" she asked helplessly.

"One I can see," he answered, with a sombre look.

"And that?"

"Time enough to talk about it when it's come. Some things are better not discussed beforehand. When there are two men in such a case, according to our modern ideas one must get out."

"What do you mean?"

"I assure you that it isn't important at present. If it comes to a question of her good name and mine, I shall consider. But now—would you go with her?"

"She wouldn't have me," said Mabel forlornly.

"You will try?"

"Of course. But where you have failed, what can I say? And yet all the time, while I know she is wrong, and I try to reason with her——"

"In 'Paolo and Francesca,'" said he, smiling faintly, "the part of Giovanni is awkward to play."

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't——?" she stammered.

## Folly

“That method seems to be out of date. I have my own.”

“You wouldn’t—you couldn’t divorce her?” she persisted.

He looked reproach: “Trust me. I shall manage it decently. Will you ask her to come down now?”

Folly obeyed at once, and found him standing with his back to the light.

“As to money——” he began abruptly.

“I have my own income,” she interrupted.

“Further than that, there will be your usual allowance for as long”—he was in some doubt how to conclude his sentence.

“No, thank you,” she said quickly. “I want money—I need it; but I want my freedom more.”

“I’m sorry,” said he slowly, “that I cannot give you that altogether.”

“You—you are good”—she tried to express gratitude.

“Spare me that. The only straight thing is to let you go; but I’d give my right hand—” he held it out in his extreme earnestness—“if I could make you see your mistake! If ever you want help——”

She shook her head in proud refusal.

“I suppose I’d better—better clear out to-night, and then you can take your time.”

She tried to control her trembling as she said: “You have never once pleaded for yourself, Andrew. Don’t



## Folly

think I did not notice—don't think me utterly without regard for you and your name. . . .”

“I think you'd better let me help you upstairs,” he urged gently.

At the door of her room he paused, breathing hard: “It's good-bye, I suppose.”

“Andrew, I swear to you, if he were not dying——”

“Don't!” he exclaimed roughly. “I'm only human.” And without kiss or caress he turned and left her.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CASTING OFF THE ROPES.

MRS. PATRICK woke the following day with a violent headache, wondering whether she had slept a single hour during the night. Nevertheless, she entered the breakfast-room at the usual time, and was amazed to find Folly seated at the little bureau in which she kept her household accounts and other business matters. She looked round with a faint smile as Mabel entered.

"I am trying to set my house in order," she said, writing rapidly as she spoke. "Andrew went by the ten o'clock train last night."

Mrs. Patrick sat down by the fire; and as the maid was bringing in the breakfast, she made no further comment than a low-voiced: "And have you been to bed at all?"

Folly did not answer; but as Mabel continued after that in pensive silence, said presently: "I suppose we must eat." She stamped half a dozen envelopes: "There, I think that completes everything."

"What have you been doing?" asked Mabel, as they took their places at the table.

## Folly

"Getting ready," answered Folly, in a tone of surprise.

"You are going, then?" Mabel groaned.

"Did you ever doubt it?"

"What shall I say to you—what can I?"

"Fish or bacon?" asked Folly.

Then Mabel hid her face, laughing and crying together.

"Don't be hysterical," said Folly. "We're always having to choose, you know. You won't? Well, you shall have fish; it's good for the nervous system."

Mabel pushed away her plate: "It isn't too late yet, Folly."

"Much," was the calm answer. "Mrs. Brent can take charge perfectly well until Andrew decides what he wants to do with the house." She rose and returned to the fire.

"Do you mean to say," implored Mabel, "that you are going to work all morning on a cup of coffee and a scrap of toast?"

"It's enough," answered Folly. "Besides, I've done most of my work. I'm just thinking over what I may have omitted."

"For Andrew's comfort?" asked Mabel ironically.

"To be sure. I needn't add the little worries to the big." She counted off on her fingers, ending: "And the letter to mater. Do you know, Mab, I remembered this morning that I am just a common thief."

## Folly

Accustomed to Folly's forms of speech, Mabel waited without comment.

"It's quite true. Last month I stole thirty pounds from Andrew's mother, and got fifty pounds more under—well, I suppose they call it—false pretences. It wasn't kleptomania, either—just insanity. But last night, when I was thinking more sanely, I decided that I wouldn't keep it after all. There couldn't be any virtue in it, got that way. I'll use my own and no more. So I'm returning it this morning with a letter. Poor little materkin! But it shows what I might come to yet."

"Do you know," said Mabel. "I lay awake nearly all night, thinking about your affairs?"

"I'm sorry," answered Folly, "because you can't mend them. What time do you propose going up to town?"

"I don't know"—Mrs. Patrick brushed aside the question. "But, Folly, you wouldn't greatly mind my going with you to Biarritz, would you? You could always shake me off at any time——"

"I'm not so sure of that," mused Folly. "But I am quite clear that it is better for me in every way to be alone."

"I want to go," insisted Mabel.

"No"—Folly stood at bay.

Mabel was silent, but looked decision unutterable.

"I don't want you, Mab," said Folly gently, "and what's more, I won't have you. And people will say——"

## Folly

“Do you think that you alone can brave public opinion?” protested Mab.

“They will say that you are running after—you know whom.”

The tears rose to Mabel’s eyes. “I don’t care,” she insisted stoutly.

“But you do. And what will he think himself? Anyway, I don’t know what’s to happen, and I won’t have you in the mix-up—so there you are!”

Mrs. Patrick seized Folly’s cold fingers in one last entreaty: “You have just told me you repented about the money, and how will it be about the greater sin?”

“It wasn’t repentance,” answered Folly wearily, “it was superstition. I hadn’t had time to think about it before. And I’m tired of arguments. Oh, we have talked, Andrew and I.”

Mabel’s spirit was suddenly aflame: “You should have had a brute of a husband to beat you into submission!”

“It would have been so easy, then,” was the unexpected answer. “It is Andrew’s very goodness that scourges me. Do you suppose I have not considered every inch of his position as well as my own? And when I have lost half the time in holding to my lawful duty, can you say it is not necessity that drives me? Ah, if you could make me see with other eyes, you would have the power of God himself!”

“And that’s true,” said Mabel sorrowfully, as they parted.

## Folly

They met again at luncheon and made a show of eating and talking, but accomplished little of either. Any attempt on Mabel's part to hark back to the subject of the morning was met by an impenetrable barrier of silence.

As they left the table Mrs. Patrick said: "I have decided upon the three o'clock train."

"Certainly," said Folly, "I will order the carriage. And afterward, s Barker can come back for me."

"You are going——?"

"At four-fifteen. I can't be ready before. You won't mind going up alone?"

"You'll come to me in town?"

"Thank you, dear. I shall be crossing to-night, I hope."

As they said farewell, Mabel whispered: "You can never get rid of me, you know."

And Folly: "Bless you, dear!"

She waited until the carriage turned the curve, then went upstairs into the empty nursery.

It was nearly four o'clock when she came out, with the look of one who had passed through the deepest waters and, though panting still from the struggle, hopes and strains toward the land.

The carriage had been waiting some time, the luggage strapped on, and Barker was consulting his watch and growing uneasy, when she came down and after a moment's hesitation in the hall, went into her husband's study.

## Folly

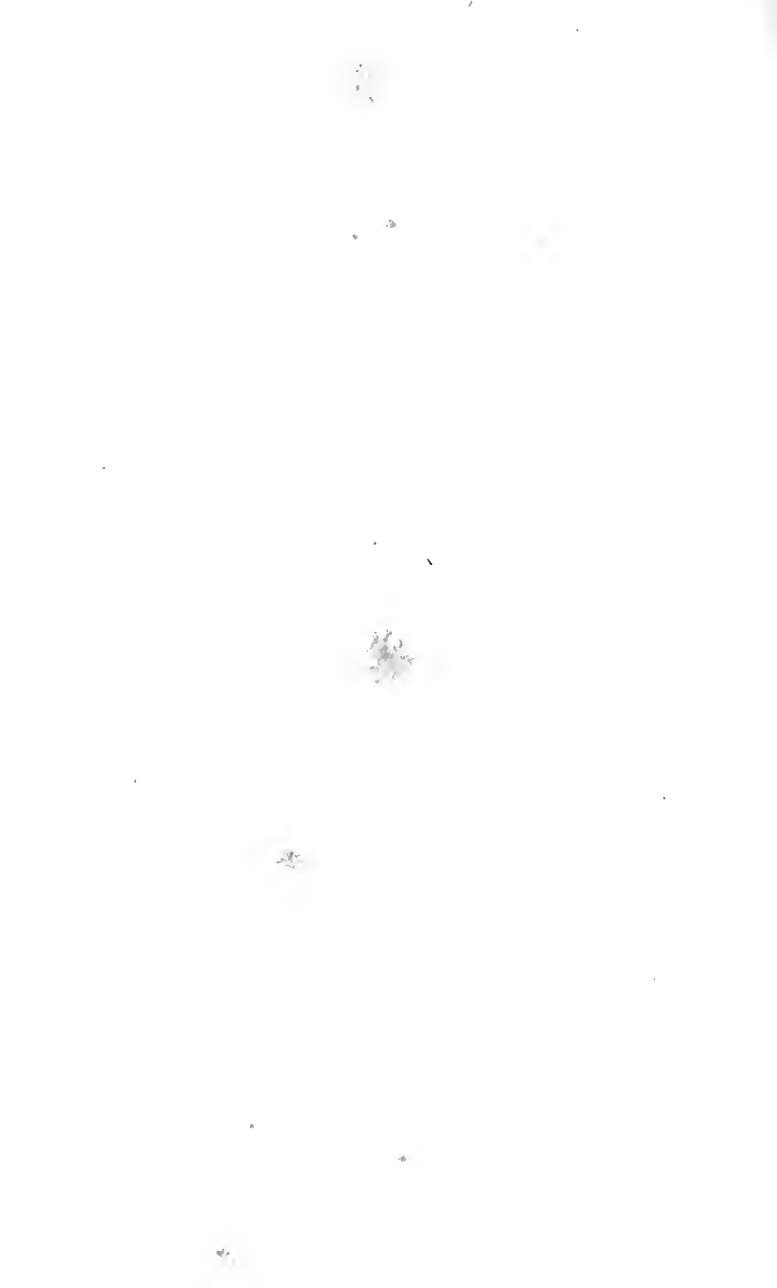
Already it had a despoiled look: the desk was locked, the blinds were down, and there was an indescribable bareness as if some important thing were missing. So strong was this feeling upon her that she made a definite search to discover what was gone; and after a time remembered that it was numerous photographs of herself, at all ages and in all guises, together with the large carbon of herself and baby, the only one that she had ever had taken. But whether he had carried them with him, or locked them away out of sight, she could not divine.

At the beginning of the new life, she stood and looked back upon the old; in the presence of the untried, she remembered much that had been sweet in the ways that she was leaving.

“Oh, I am sorry, I am sorry!” she thought, with a pang. “And I never told him.”

All in a moment she grew weak and feared that she could not go, so summoned her failing strength and almost ran out of the room.

Once in the carriage, she did not look back; and when she arrived at the station, just as the train stopped, with scarcely a second to spare, her remorse gave way to the strong exultation of one who, whether for right or wrong, for blessing or woe, has cast off the ropes and entered upon a new voyage.





BOOK II.

THE CITY OF THORNS.

“May Love, by whom alone we live,  
Fullness grant of grace ;  
One fleeting hour may he give,  
Ere Death shall win the race.”

J. HALDANE GORE, after Holbein.

## CHAPTER XV.

### DREAMS.

ON a low round hill between the headland of Higer and the broad sandy *plage* lies the walled town of Espinal—the grim half-empty shell of an ancient Spanish city, decaying among its maize fields. Of its origin history knows no word; but legend tells how a poor shepherdess, cursed with an incurable disease, was one day watching her flock high above the sea, when suddenly against the sky she beheld a lady all shining with gold, her feet whiter than the blossoms of a thorn-tree on which they rested. As the shepherdess knelt, knowing well that this could be only the Mother of God, the Lady stooped to pluck a spray of flowers, let it fall at the poor woman's feet, and said smiling: "Remember me by this." And straightway she was gone. But where the thorn blossom had dropped among dry heather and stinging gorse, now it floated in a tiny spring that bubbled from the earth, and grew ever larger as it welled. And when the shepherdess bent in all reverence to gather up the flower-spray, the moment that her hand touched the water she knew that she was healed. So she took the holy thing in her kerchief,

## Folly

daring not to lay finger upon it, and carried it to her priest and told him her tale.

In witness whereof you have to-day the chapel and shrine of Our Lady of the Thorn-tree, together with the sisterhood that still tends the unwithered sacred spray in its golden reliquary, and the manifold descendants of the sacred tree that crowd the cloister, and the sacred spring that still bubbles in the crypt. And again, you have the name itself—*Espinal*, *place of thorns*—in later days bestowed upon the valley-town that grew up and blossomed and died in the cult of this wonder-working shrine.

And still the miracle goes on from day to day, from year to year; and the tale of those that are healed covers the chapel walls with golden letters. Every April, from all the country round, there is a pilgrimage to the mountain-church of Espinal; and after, until the year swings back in its circle, at the harvesting or by the fireside, the peasants tell of the fresh cures that are wrought.

At other seasons, the town is as dead as its ancient monarch, Sancho Clawfoot, who sleeps in the black fort that crowns the hill. The emblazoned gateways are undefended and half broken away, and the moat is choked with Indian corn. The cathedral, gilded within by the piety of those that have built them stately tombs there, and without by the golden-fingered sun, is crumbling away, stone by stone. The high shuttered houses, with their carven roofs and balconies overhung

## Folly

with flowers, seem always silent and empty; and few are they that pass up and down the mouldering stairways. It is nearly three hundred years since, in a petty war, she perished whose battlements had daunted the Romans, and defied the Goths, and turned aside the Moors; and she will never wake again among the cities of the world. She has had her Cid, not sung like him of Burgos; and in her time she has sent flotillas to the Indies; and now she boasts by way of citizens a handful of fisherman that net the bay at her feet, and a few nail-workers and makers of hemp-soled *alpar-gatas*, who toil a little, and smoke much, and sing now and then, as they hammer and bind along her shady streets. One of the world's retreats is Espinal, unwritten, unsung, unvisited.

It was by the idlest concatenation of events that Gregory and his patient found themselves in the "City of Thorns." Gore had all at once sickened of Biarritz and threatened a return to England; and Gregory, in a maze of futile experiments, worried, hopeless, but teased onward by an indomitable will, had plucked up cheer to say: "Let's drop everything for a week or two, and have a look over the Border."

So they had journeyed idly from one wayside station to another, till they came to Erro, where there is nothing but a miserable inn and a neglected unlovely church. Undoubtedly they would have gone farther, had not Gore noticed a dusty diligence, empty yet

## Folly

waiting at the door of the *fonda*, as if it hoped to pick up a passenger or two. In the spirit of adventure, they essayed it; and without asking its destination, jogged comfortably along with the driver, now dropping a limp mail-bag, now picking up a packet of medicine, or, it might be, a country-girl with a basketful of fowls on her head, or a priest too fat to walk between the confines of his parish. After many kilometres, they judged, of easy mule-work, they alighted on the sandy bank of a river that emptied into the sea before their eyes; and upon their demand what place was this, they were seized by a brawny Basque ferryman, and dragged to the corner of his hut, the while he pointed to the sudden apparition of a great mountain and a city on a dome-like hill in its shadow, ejaculating, "Higuer—Espinal"—upon which, at that time, they were none the wiser. Even more, he raised a forefinger toward the spire that flung itself into the sky far above them, and murmured, "*Nuestra Señora de las Espinas*," and bared his head, with the sign of the Cross, making a prayer.

They were rowed over, in and out among the shallows of the tidal stream, and when they had climbed the steep Calle Marina, through the war-beaten gate, and had set eyes upon the empty winding street above, with its double burden of many-coloured houses, they said to each other that this was the quiet place they had been looking for, all their lives.

Still in the spirit of adventure, they had established

## Folly

themselves in a little *jonda*, all stucco and carvings and balconies outside; and within, clean and bare and silent in that at this season there were no other guests than themselves.

From their windows they could watch the misty sun climb out of the sea and burn into a white radiance that streamed down upon the huddle of red roofs overtopped by the black fort and the golden-domed cathedral; they could watch it sink behind the ridge of purple mountain with its sky-piercing spire.

Through sunny lazy days, all too short, they wandered between the cliff-like houses, where the streets were often given over to rooting pigs or goats browsing on the grass between the cobbles. Very soon they began to exchange greetings with the children, and to talk with the elders, feeble relics of an old humanity that has lingered on in this one spot for perhaps two thousand years and more. They idled on the walls, and worked out the ancient plan of the city, and the engineering devices by which it was at length overthrown. More than once they sailed out with the fishermen; and often they trod the stony foot-paths among the Basque farms and orchards, set out with heavy-timbered gay-painted, galleried homesteads, gabled unevenly, proudly carved with name and date and the arms of the valley, hung out above with great bunches of dried herbs that sweetened all the air, and tenanted below by the beasts of the field.

In these quiet days they forgot time. Whether on the

## Folly

sands, or high on the hill, or within the barbaric church, or on the bench at the door of the *fonda*, Gregory pondered over the various aspects of his problem, and strove to gather up his scattered results into a theory that should further his intention; while Gore mused upon the beauty that informed the scene, and sometimes had a dim sense that his singing-gift might return.

But the change came with the swiftness of tragedy, on a day when the fine weather broke in a gust of blinding rain.

Gregory came in from the post and found Gore staring at the ragged sodden garden.

"Still at your beloved tamarisks?" said he, feigning good cheer.

But Gore was alert with: "Any letters?"

"One for me, and some papers. That's all the post office saw fit to hand over."

They sat down to luncheon in silence. Gore twiddled his spoon, without attempting to eat.

"Look here," said Gregory suddenly, "this won't do. We've wasted enough time. I think we'll go to Paris. I've a new notion—that you might consult Brousseau."

"Consult the devil!" said Gore hotly. "You've got to get back to London, as I've said fifty times already. When a man can't take a hint . . ."

"Hints?" said Gregory. "It's my business now to see that you take your beef-tea."



## Folly

"Spoon-meat," grumbled Gore. "The next stage will be a feeding-bottle. If I've got to die, starvation is better than the alternative. Pass the oranges, will you? With them I can still pretend to be a man."

There was another gloomy silence, during which Gore played with his orange, then he said with a laugh: "What particular demon of the legion is it that tempts a man to hope for the impossible?"

Evidently Gregory read a particular meaning into these words for he responded: "But why should she write?"

"Why, indeed?"—Gore was ironic.

Gregory hesitated: "I have a piece of news for you. My letter was from Mrs. Patrick. . . ."

"I knew it. Is the wooing on or off?"

"I am not aware of any wooing," answered Gregory stiffly. "The news is—they have lost their child."

Gore was silent a long time before he said, as if thinking aloud, "What will she do now?" and followed it up with a quick, "By God, man, if I were half alive, I'd go back yet!"

"You would, would you?" said Gregory drily. "Then it's a good thing you're not."

"You don't know . . ."

"I know there's been a hell of a muddle, and you'd make it worse if you could."

"Don't jump on a man that's down."

"I'm not jumping; but I don't want you to get

## Folly

back into that tangle. You do the right thing for once in your life—the sort of thing any decent chap would do—and then when you've got safely away, you want to go back and upset the whole business."

"Don't you worry. I'm not going back. So let me have my howl in peace."

Gregory shrugged: "I don't mind. But I'm going back—to Biarritz anyway—and then very likely to Paris."

"Same old thing?" asked Gore.

Gregory nodded: "I've a new idea. . . ."

"Oh, drop it; you're not the hundredth man. Go back to your surgery. There's something indecent about the way you're trying to stretch out my existence."

"What have you been doing this morning?" asked Gregory, to turn the subject.

"Working—six lines or so. Pater's allowance, wasn't it? But I'm not proud of them. Going to be in this afternoon? Then I'll retreat. I don't want to get on your nerves."

"Turn it the other way about," said Gregory, unoffended.

He began to arrange his pamphlets and papers, and Gore went upstairs to a certain shabby green arm-chair in which he often found comfort. It was adapted by long experience to a lounging body; and he had rendered it more companionable by a series of friendly and suggestive holes burnt by the ashes of countless cigarettes. Here he fell to smoking idly and watching

## Folly

the grey sea pour its tides along the sands; but soon perceived that he was vaguely disturbed by the absence of the woman across the way.

His room had two windows, one overlooking the roofs below on the hill, the top of the city wall, the beach and the bay; the other facing a narrow cross street and a tall house let out in tenements. In the room on a level with his, he had been wont to study his neighbour, as an excuse for not working. On this day, he was displeased to find that her shutters were closed; perhaps she too was cold and desolate, and had gone with others of her kind to huddle over a brazier of charcoal.

She reminded him vaguely of Folly, this young Basque woman, with her wavy tawny hair. She appeared to be a seamstress, living quite alone with her baby. From Monday to Saturday she bent over her machine; but on Sunday she went soberly to mass in the morning, leaving the child with a neighbour; and in the afternoon she and the baby together blossomed like flowers on her little balcony.

At one time or another, Gore had seen most of her little domestic operations. They were done frankly, in the full light of day. She had no scruples against combing her beautiful hair before a looking-glass by the window; and then she was like Titian's "Laura Dianti," heavier of build, more exuberant than Folly, he remembered. . . . Often he would hear her chirruping to the baby to keep it quiet, as she moved about

## Folly

getting her breakfast; and sometimes she sang it lullabies in a strange soft tongue of which he understood no word, to plaintive tunes that made the body throb and thrill with the longing to dance.

Sometimes she leaned far from her balcony, perhaps aware of his watching presence; and then he could see that she was very different from Folly, with full rosy lips that might be sweet, but were not over-sensitive, or prone to forbid.

She always ate her breakfast by the window, dipping her hard roll into a bowl of chocolate. He may have imagined that the smell of it drifted to him across the street, but he was very sure in his own mind that it was not coffee she drank. Sometimes, as she sat munching, she had her baby across her knees; and the picture of the two of them against the dim background of the room made him homesick with longing for a life that he should never know. Sometimes, when apparently for no reason at all, she smiled out into the sunshine, with a swift sparkle of eyes and teeth, he could have cried out to her: "Come over, Folly!"

He often wondered who the man was; she seemed so absolutely alone. Of a Sunday evening now and then, she would bring out writing materials to the window, and purse her lips over a long-enduring letter. And even when the pen spared her blots, there were times when her left hand was not quick enough to wipe away the tears, so that her page was rarely other than ink-splashed, he was sure. . . . Was the man a sailor,

## Folly

he wondered, and would he come back some day to make her happy? It would be a different life-tale then from his own and Folly's. . . .

To-day he missed her—indeed, he found that he could not work without seeing her busy and happy over the way; she had become in some curious manner his only inspiration.

“Where’s the bit I was doing this morning?”—he rummaged among the loose sheets in his portfolio. “I must have torn it up by mistake—with the other stuff—no, here it is,” He began to read:

“A little church where village feet that press  
The vintage, meek the way of prayer have trod,  
And beaten out the name and lineage  
Of him whose crest . . .”

“Smells of decay already,” he muttered. “Better cut it short. Suppose I have a fancy for messing with such themes, what’s the good of them to the living? I’m outside the garden, ready for the unknown road; they’re still within, among the flowers and snakes, thanking God that the call is not for them yet. If I write at all, I ought to try to help them to live, not to die—that comes without learning.

“Posterity? I wonder what put into my head that old Viking sentry who scratched a picture of himself and his horse on a stone, and wrote: ‘So-and-so kept watch here.’ And I who know the tale have forgotten

## Folly

the name. That was a little thousand years ago. And in ten thousand? . . . There's nothing washes out so fast as printer's ink. But for the present even, have I got anything that needs to be told?

“‘The builder with his trowel wrought a day’—which is the very point. To the rubbish heap, my friend.

“‘Thou errant lad’—but who cares for an old monk's scrawl on a musty manuscript? Away, ‘thou little piping boy!’

“‘Oh, it's I that stray along the windy moorland road’ . . . there are banshees enough for All Souls' Eve.

‘That winter's night  
When hawthorn white  
Bloweth as in May,  
God's self once dight  
His streaming bright  
Lanthorn for our way.’

“Rather old-fashioned and out of date that. Here goes; they'll all come out papier maché dolls one day, or something equally delightful and useful. . . . If a man can't be a great poet, he has no business to be a poet at all. The little I had to say, I've said, and it will be forgotten soon, as it deserves to be. And now that we've cleared the board, it remains only to write no others. What can a half-man do with himself but get out of the way as fast and as decently as he can?

“Now as for Greg—he's got to go home next week.

## Folly

The little game he has been playing is a dead loss all round. I believe he only keeps it up for appearance's sake. He must get back to his Mrs. Patrick; and I shall make shift where I am. What's the difference? I have arranged everything. Ah, if she were here. . . ."

He turned aside from the perilous sweetness of that thought, and scribbled a while: random verses, phrases, scraps of thought—blurred, distorted. At last he gave up the attempt, and tossing his fifth cigarette, scarcely begun, through the window, to rejoice the goatherd then piping below with his flock, he clasped his hands behind his head, and gave himself over to the host of forbidden dreams that came thronging.

He heard Gregory's voice below, and wondered idly who was his visitor. Perhaps, after all, if by some miracle it was Folly—Folly come to take the chain of his days into her strong white hands, and to weave them into a web of joy—Folly, fled from home and duty at the call of his love—Folly come to the City of Thorns.

He deluded himself into thinking that it was a woman's voice that he heard—hers; but presently sank back in his chair, mumbling: "Dreams—dreams."

Soon the vision returned, with teasing lips and alluring eyebrows. She called him foolish for wanting her, she laughed and said she would not stay; and with the very speaking, she cuddled on his arm-chair, whispering: "I don't love you one little bit; but I've come to torment you as long as—as long as . . ."

He sprang to his feet, staring about the room. The

## Folly

words had been so plain—so plain: “Tell him I am here.”

He tried to speak—to call to Gregory; but his voice stuck in his throat. “Like everything else, damn it!” he cursed.

As soon as he had reasoned himself into a state of quiescence, back she came, sweeter than before—and kissed him. . . . That voice again—intolerable! It sounded like a smothered cry, and he could distinguish no words; but it was so real that he seemed to feel its cadence lingering in the air after it had ceased.

He listened, every nerve on the strain; but aside from the opening and shutting of a door below, the house was absolutely still.

Before he had recovered his train of dreams, Gregory came hastily up the stairs.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, reading suspicion and even a strange conviction in Gore’s eyes.

“She is—here?”

“No.” But his face betrayed the truth.

“She has been.”

“She has gone away.”

Gore started to his feet and would have left the room without a word; but Gregory caught and held him in his arms.

“No, you don’t,” said he quietly. “Hear what I have to say first.”



## CHAPTER XVI.

### REALITY.

GREGORY was not aware of any feeling of surprise when the pale narrow-eyed woman whom the Basque servant showed into the sitting-room announced herself as Mrs. Christie, and asked to see Gore. He was conscious of thinking only that the ferryman was late; or else that she had had a long search for them, which in a place where there were only two Englishmen was almost incredible, if she knew enough Spanish to ask a question or two; or it might be that she had had the grace to hesitate before she entered their door.

"He is upstairs," he answered, pushing forward a chair. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Is he much worse?" she asked. Her appearance was so obscured by her long travelling cloak and veil that only from her voice could he judge of the charm that had drawn his friend's mind from its pivotal centre.

He shrugged.

"I came from England to find out." As Gregory said nothing, she added: "I may see him now?"

## Folly

"In a moment"—he was striving to gain time. "May I ask how you found us?"

"Easy enough"—she smiled faintly. "I got the Biarritz address to which letters were forwarded; and there, they directed me further. You have not answered my questions."

"As to seeing him"—Gregory flushed—"I cannot forbid that at present—not even as his physician. But as his friend, may I ask you—without impertinence—whether you quite realize the state of affairs?"

"I realize that he is very ill," said she. "And you have told me nothing more."

"You would not observe much change; but the disease has progressed. A crisis is possible almost any day; but yet—under the best conditions—it may be staved off for a considerable time."

"What do you mean by 'the best conditions'?" she demanded.

"Perfect quiet—peace of mind—proper care"—he was beginning; but seeing the light in her face, gave his sentence a rough turn: "Every woman thinks she can supply those, no doubt."

"And is she wrong?" she asked, in her thrilling voice.

"To be candid"—he frowned upon her—"I find myself in a most awkward, not to say embarrassing position."

"It need not embarrass you," she answered coolly. "You have only to take me as I come."

## Folly

“You don’t understand”—his tone softened a little in spite of himself. “I mean, as to my own course of action.”

“Ah!” she said, and waited.

“As his physician, I believe in telling you plain facts, if you demand them; as his friend, I am not clear where my duty lies.”

“Then I should think you’d better speak as the physician. Have you any hope of a cure?”

“None.” He met her eyes squarely, and she did not falter.

“You thought once——”

“Ah, yes, and I still think it may be done. I may even be on the right track. But not in the time—not in the time”—he concluded rather to himself, as if forgetting her presence.

She was silent a moment, with bowed head, then looked up bravely: “But if that is true, I have no time to lose.”

“What do you think you could do for him?” asked Gregory bluntly, studying her with frank curiosity.

“Do you suppose I have not asked myself that question hundreds of times?” She caught her breath, and turned upon him: “What do you think?”

“I think probably you could hasten his death.” There was stern condemnation in Gregory’s voice.

“How?” she would know.

“Put the case,” he continued more gently. “When a man is ill, the very physical changes that precede the

## Folly

end usually cut him loose from life and the desire of living long before——”

He spared her the conclusion of his sentence; and she was quick to ask: “As his friend now, can you say that he has already forgotten me?”

No; it was evident that he could not honestly say that.

“Ah!”—she forgot her sorrow in triumph—“then I have still a little time.”

“A little while”—he granted her—“a little while longer, it may go on. But do you expect a dying man to love you? The idea is horrible—absurd, as well. We put all those things away before.”

“Do we?” she asked. “Do we?”

And he only: “Is it worth the sacrifice?”

But she insisted: “I am the judge of that.”

He thought her dense. “Oh, I know, when one wants to give, it’s difficult to realize that the gift may not be advisable or—or acceptable.”

She seemed not to have caught the last word: “If you had seen me at Biarritz,” she began hastily, and then stopped and changed the form of her thought: “It was not by an easy way that I came here. Even when I had got so far—only to find you gone—I had another struggle to reason out whether I was doing—not right, but what was best for all of us. I walked up and down the sands—up and down before the Casino there—you know? I never once thought of turning back; but to go on where one was not sure—when the

## Folly

other had made no sign—it seemed temptingly easy rather to slip off the rocks into that vivid sea and forget everything. But it would have been shirking. Oh, I thought it well out, as I tramped backwards and forwards until my feet were like lead. And in the end, direction came by chance—or, if I were superstitious, I should say by revelation. The sands were hot in the sun that day; and as I wandered among the crowd of strangers, I caught sight of a man sitting unobserved, it seemed, in the shadow of the Casino steps. I could have thought—I did think—that nobody else saw him, for his dress should have attracted wonder, even jeers. It was a sort of white monk's robe and sandals——”

Gregory's eyes asked plainly: “Why all this to me?”

“And his hair and beard were chestnut brown and uncut, and his eyes as blue as the sea on which they were bent; and he sat absolutely still, with his hands clasped over a long staff that I afterward saw was a shepherd's crook. Every time I went up and down, I felt impelled to look at him; but he never seemed to have moved or withdrawn his eyes from the sea. The last time, then—I had made up my mind to go away from the temptation there—I found him standing and leaning on the crook; and as I gazed, he fixed his eyes upon me, and I forgot everything else in the world. I don't know whether he spoke; I seemed to see the words coming from his lips: “The path of thorns for you.” I don't know what followed—I was blind—and when I looked again, he was gone.”

## Folly

"I remember," said Gregory suddenly, "we heard of that man. The story came to me that he was harmlessly mad, and believed himself one of the prophets; but somebody told Gore that he was an impostor—had been an artist's model—and made a living by palmistry and fortune-telling . . . that's Biarritz for you."

"No matter, it served," she said, with a touch of enthusiasm in her voice. "As I turned away, the meaning of the words flashed upon me as fiercely as if it had been written in fire: "The path of thorns—*Espinal*." But still I was not content. I said, I will try one more test—it will be the third—and I will abide by the lot, whichever way it falls. I was mad, no doubt; you will say so. But I had no hesitation. I walked straight into the Casino and staked all on a single throw: *Espinal or the rocks*. I took the first money I touched and threw down a ten-pound note; two seconds later I gathered up five thousand francs. So I came."

What could he do with a woman like this? thought Gregory. Aloud he said: "Have you no fear in playing with your life and fate?"

"I knew," she answered quietly, "but I wanted the seal of chance. What can you say?"

"Nothing but go ahead and pay after," he replied coldly.

"We're in the minority, and must suffer for that, I suppose. Society exacts its payment; but if I can do anything to make it less hard for him now—?"

## Folly

He turned to her impatiently; he had answered that argument before: "He is bound to suffer. What on earth can you do? You'll remember my words when it's too late."

"Let him decide, then, whether he wants me," she said.

He smiled bitterly. "Oh, it's a great thing, this eternal *you* and *I* business. It carries on the universe, no doubt; but there's no virtue in it, as your poets are always declaring. It's selfish—selfish to the core."

"What is there in this world that is not?" she met him. "But I grant it—I grant anything you like; it makes no difference. Only tell him I am here."

"There it is again,"—he turned upon her angrily—"selfish, and unreasonable. You would snatch from him the right to die in peace, because you claim you cannot live without him. You drop all other duties to torment him the last months of his life; and a year hence it will be all the same. I tell you, there's a time and place for loving in the scheme of the universe; but to let it dominate you—master you. . . ."

"When you have done with your sermon," said she, quiet but very pale, "you will tell me where to find him?"

Gregory winced, for of all men he most hated preaching.

"I have only just come into my right," she continued, "and it is not you who shall keep me from it."

"Very well"—he gave up the contest. "I will tell

## Folly

him and trouble you no longer." He got as far as the door, there paused. "All the same, I might add a word to show you his own point of view."

She trembled and shrank away from him in her chair.

"You are not sure, for all your bravado,"—he faced her keenly. "You have a deadly fear—well, we need not put it into words. The other day, he showed me a poem he had just written. It began, 'Love is a vampire.' It was pretty bad, I should think—I am no judge of such things; but it revealed a sense of what I consider a piece of raw truth—truth that we politely cover up when we can—truth that you are ignoring, and that will be your undoing. I tell you there's no place for you in his life now; and he is beginning to realize it. Only beginning, I admit; but in a month—a week, perhaps,—who can tell?"

"You think you understand me, but I am sure you do not," she answered slowly.

"And there's your blindness—just there,"—his forefinger was harsh. "You think you are giving, sacrificing, and the rest of it; and all the while you are sucking blood, drawing life . . . . I am brutal?"

"Yes," she gasped.

"I know what I am talking about, and as his friend I warn you." There was no mistaking the solemn conviction of his tone.

She could not speak, and he waited with his hand on the knob. "Shall I tell him you are here?"



## Folly

“No,” she whispered, and could say no more.

“Your own heart tells you I am right,” he pursued relentlessly.

“I should do harm—I should hurt him——” It was impossible to say how far this was a question. “Then I must go away?”

“You will spare both much suffering,” he said grimly.

She rose and approached the door. “If he should ask about me—ever—will you tell him I came to Espinal and went away again?” She broke short with a cry: “Oh, I can’t—I can’t! Not for his sake even. I must see him one minute—one little minute——”

“I think you will be better advised,” said he, as gently as he could.

She arose to go, and something in her expression moved him to seize her arm: “No rocks, mind.”

She shrugged.

“You will not be quite such a fool, I hope,” he cried, with vehemence.

“If I am not,” she answered slowly, “it will be because I have still some faith that what must be shall be. I suppose you are right; it is difficult enough. And you are honest. But it may be that you cannot keep us apart. I shall wait. . . .”

She gave him a long, steady look, as he held the door open for her; then went away without finishing her sentence.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### THE LAST TOSS-UP.

SHE walked slowly away without purpose or aim. She knew that the rain was driving fast, and raised her umbrella against it. She was conscious of climbing a steep road, where the cobbles were shining and slippery; and of turning her back on the sea where it raced along in surf pounding the beach; and she observed that she had entered a short avenue of interlaced feathery tamarisks, that she passed a fountain and a stone table with benches where women might work and sing in the summer-time. But for the drip of the rain she would have sat down there, being all at once overcome by a heavy lassitude.

She dragged herself onward, and came to a lofty panelled oaken door; and by the carved saints and angels above it, with the Virgin crowning all, she perceived that she was before a church.

She entered, without knowing why, except that it was easier to go on than to turn back; and was at once confronted by a great darkness, with here and there pinpoints of light, crowning tapers that illuminated the

## Folly

gold of obscure altars. With a sense of refuge and comfort, that still involved scant recognition of the place as a cathedral, she dropped upon a bench before the nearest shrine; the faint odour of incense, the silence, the shadows were all narcotic to her pain.

Here and there against the mist of candles was outlined a black figure kneeling at the feet of the Holy Ones. And presently Folly slipped to her knees, not thinking, scarcely praying, unless a blind straining towards help that is withheld be counted as prayer. But by degrees the ponderous altar, with its twisted gilded pillars, and the sculptured wealth of divine imagery and symbolism, out of all keeping with a wasted town, pressed upon her mind. She found herself noting even the tawdry lace and worsted flowers bestowed by poor but loving hearts. But chiefly the painted figure which forms the centre of these gorgeous devices of the goldsmith's art drew her eyes. It was of wood, antique in carving, rich in gold vestments, with a sweet frail face that haunted her with a sense vague of familiarity. It was when she discovered or fancied some resemblance, in type or in spirit, to the Madonna at Sunlands that she bowed her head under the thronging memories. Everywhere her sacrifice was refused. What was her place? What should be the end?

She looked up at last, and found Haldane Gore standing in the aisle by her side.

"I am come for you," he said.

## Folly

And she could find no answer but: "How did you know I was here?"

He smiled upon her. "There are no English ladies in Espinal; and many hands pointed the way to the church. The streets that look empty are full of eyes above. Once within, I saw the candle-light on your hair"—in the close atmosphere she had put away her veil—"and that was all I needed."

She turned aside, faltering: "I don't want your pity."

"My pity, girl!"—his voice should have been reassuring; but she noted with a stab of pain how much of its old music was lost. "Are you ready to come home?"

"Where is that?" she asked.

"Where we two are together," said he, and laid his hand upon her arm.

She shook it off gently. "No—please."

As they looked at each other, he was thinking with a faint sense of amusement how odd it was that a man could hold a fort unshaken for six months, then lower the flag in the twinkling of an eye. And she was wondering how best to ask the question that struggled to her lips and yet could not be uttered at all.

"Why did you come, then?"—he smiled at her.

"Espinal is the place of thorns," she murmured, as if to herself.

"And you are used to cotton-wool!"

"I shouldn't have minded anything, I think," she

## Folly

answered, with a sudden strength. "But now I am going away again because . . ."

"We can talk better in the cloister," said he, and drew her arm through his.

They walked slowly round the four sides, between the elaborate tracery of the arches that opened upon the dank garden, and the walls with their broken effigies and faded frescoes that mark the graves of forgotten warriors and ecclesiastics.

"Why do you come and go away again? Gregory? I thought so. He said as much. And when he had done talking, I followed you at once, as you see."

"But he was right?" she urged.

"Perhaps. What's the good of bothering now about right and wrong? We've wasted enough time already, and only succeeded in warping ourselves, and making others miserable. I'm done fighting. Let's give it up; for after all, you had to come."

"Yes," she answered, "after all, I had to come. Do you mean that we should not bother about anything, but just be happy?"

He nodded, laughing. "Something very like that. Happy as people never are when they have a life-time before them."

"But Gregory said I should be a vampire. . . ."

"Drop Gregory. Now you are here, I can't do without you, and I won't! I am like a thirsty man who has found a spring in the desert."

Her face was no less sombre. "To keep the figure,

## Folly

if you are the traveller, in the very nature of things you must journey on and leave the spring behind in the desert."

His face had gone a dull red. Suddenly he dropped it on her shoulder. "Don't argue. I want you. I'm selfish. Come."

She just touched his forehead with her finger-tips, smiling with dim eyes; but gave no answer at first. After a time, as he did not speak or move, she said softly: "And Gregory?"

"He's gone."

"Gone?"

"Back to Biarritz, and so home. There was just time for a train. I heard him out; and then I told him what I meant to do. He understood, and will have got away by now; it was the only thing."

"And what did he say?" she asked sadly.

Gore hesitated: "Not much. Only that love has knocked out friendship pretty well since the world began. And that's true, isn't it?"

"It's rank ingratitude"—she was beginning; but he stopped her. "No more of that. We're dropping right and wrong, you know. Where's your luggage?"

"At the diligence office. You see, I made no provision for retreat. And yet I did not bring it the whole way, either."

"We'd better go at once and see about getting it ferried over."

They left the cloister by a passage that opens

## Folly

into a *patio* or courtyard, surrounded by mean houses.

Here she turned to him with a faint smile. "I haven't fully made up my mind yet, you know. Gregory talked and you talk, and what am I to think of it all? The scales are hanging in the balance—what is to tip them the one way or the other?"

"My need," said he hastily.

"Yes, but it's one need over against another need," she was beginning.

And he: "We must make an end of this foolery."

Suddenly from a black doorway two ragged urchins tumbled out, close-locked in a fierce silent struggle, and wrestled back and forth over the cobbles.

"There it is," said he. "It's been like that with me ever since I gave you up: the self that cried out for you, and the self that remembered you and counted the cost. Here's a solution. I'm reckless now. Toss up. Let them fight it out. Choose your man; and if he wins, you have your way, which is mine, too, now; otherwise. . . ."

She could not resist the challenge. "The blond then. He's smaller, but wiry and full of pluck. . . ."

"Are you giving or taking odds?" he asked.

But before she could answer, her little champion had knocked his opponent into the gutter, and was pounding his head against the stones.

Gore dragged off the sulky victor and held him up, tousle-headed and snarling, for judgment.

## Folly

But Folly was bending over the vanquished, endeavouring to fasten her handkerchief about a small deep cut over his left eye—an attention which he doggedly resisted, as no doubt thinking it a lace-edged bit of coddling, unbecoming the dignity of a man. A *peseta* he accepted as a sufficient salve, and disappeared round the corner, grinning triumph over his conqueror, with a last upward thrust at the bandage, and blood trickling afresh down his dirty cheek.

Another *peseta* to the victor scarcely atoned for the injury to his pride; and he retired, red-faced and muttering.

“There we did wrong,” said Gore. “We rewarded them alike, when one was wrong and one right; and one was the better man of the two, but it did him no good.”

“What matter for that?” she cried, flushed and laughing, as if a heavy weight had fallen from her shoulders. “I knew we should win; it was written in the stars. But it was you this time who cast the lot. Come now, we can be happy at last”—her face grew dim again, as she added softly—“for a little while.”



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### THE HOME-COMING.

IT was amazing to see how quickly she took command. She would not listen for a moment to Gore's crossing the ferry with her, but sent him to the *fonda* to prepare her welcome home, as she phrased it, declaring herself able and eager to manage and direct any number of boatmen and porters and muleteers. And in this mood she had her way.

Gore returned to the inn and straightway drove the *señora*-proprietress distracted with his demands for things unheard of in that place that should increase the English lady's comfort. He chose for her a room like his own, facing the sea, and immediately insisted upon a dozen alterations. There must be fresh curtains, and larger rugs, and a more comfortable arm-chair, and a shelf for books, and flowers. . . . Afterwards, there was a chattering as of angry swallows in the kitchen, where the *señora* conferred with her domestics. And where was she to get such flowers in Espinal at this time of year? In the sitting-room he was scarcely less exigent, so that by the time his chocolate and water were

## Folly

brought up the nerves of the whole household were a-flutter.

But the twilight was settling, chilly and heavy with clouds, before Folly came in, fresh with damp air, her eyes dark and brilliant with excitement, holding out her hands in a way that seemed to forbid embrace.

“It is not the same. You have been altering. How pretty—the tamarisks!” Her glance roved about the room, as she held her fingers toward the red charcoal. “You have thought of everything. No, you are not to move. That Basque girl will show me the way. Why was I so long? Oh, I sent my luggage on. I believe it has been below for ages, but they never noticed, of course, being Spanish. I—must you know, then?—I went back to the cathedral. No, don’t take me up yet. Not to think or to hesitate, but only to realize, and to wish, and, perhaps, to pray a little. You don’t mind? Of course we were sure before that it had to be; but somehow I could not help wanting a—well, perhaps a blessing—on our—new life.”

“Wheedling the other world, since this is bound to be harsh”—he smiled at her and, suddenly overcome by weariness, dropped back into his chair.

“Yes”—she was very serious about it—“but we’ll put all that away now and—and live.” She fell on her knees by his side, and he drew her close with that sense of fulfilment, of completeness, which is the most perfect and the rarest joy that life gives.

But into his peace, into the thankful cry of his heart

## Folly

that their struggle was done, came the sudden stabbing pain that brought the sweat of agony to his face. She felt him tremble; and misunderstood, and drew closer, while he was fighting the groans that strove for utterance. The sweetest moment of her life had become for him, in the space of a breath, almost too terrible to bear. He held her in silence, with the single thought that, at any cost, he must hide from her this beginning of the end until she had had her little taste of the life she craved.

The light of the brazier was on her face and hair, but his features were in shadow; and the love-words on her lips found no response but in his clasp.

She might have divined the truth, had she not been so absorbed in the strangeness of her new joy. As it was, she withdrew after a time, perhaps unconsciously a little chilled by his tension, or frightened, or shy, and declared that she must go and dress herself to his liking.

"You are always to my liking," he had answered; and what devil of memory brought it into her mind that her husband had often used these very words?

She rang for the grave-eyed Basque chambermaid to help her unpack and shake out and hang up her gowns; and she herself arranged the dressing-table, and smiled often into the glass, and said again and again how she was happy at last.

And when the maid had gone, she brought out the only white dress among all the black array—one that

## Folly

had got in, she scarcely knew how, perhaps because it had no trace of colour about it.

“I can’t wear mourning this one night—my great night,” she was thinking, as she stroked the creases out of the plain white poplin.

Suddenly, as her fingers played among the frills, they came upon a small brown stain, forgotten ever since the dress had been put away after its one wearing. The memory flashed up: there had been people to dinner—gossips, slanderers, whom she hated—and afterwards she had sent for the baby, sound asleep in the old cradle, to show them; perhaps to disarm their tongues by a glimpse of her domesticity, perhaps only to give herself the joy of holding him at a forbidden hour. And thus rudely awakened he had not cried, as they all expected, but had sat up, dewy-eyed with sleep, and had played with her chain, and knocked her coffee-spoon against the frill. It was difficult to remember that the brown spot remained and baby was gone. . . . But to wear the dress was impossible. . . . She must go down in her black, after all.

For some reason that she did not trouble to define, she adorned herself with gems—not the splendour of diamonds, or the purity of pearls, or opals, the stones of misfortune, but topaz and amethyst and sapphire and ruby and emerald, so that she sparkled with many-coloured rays as she came down the long polished coldly-lighted corridor and stairway, and found her

## Folly

lover in the same dark room, in the same attitude over the brazier of charcoal.

“No lights?” she demanded gaily.

And he: “So soon? I didn’t expect you for half an hour yet. We dine here. There’s no one else at the *fonda*, and the vast bare dining-room is insufferable. Shall I ring?”

They had the lights on then, and they laughed and talked quite in the old comfortable fashion over the strange soup, and stranger fish, and meat dishes strangest of all.

But to Gore the courses seemed interminable; for the part that he was playing grew every moment more difficult. The soft-voiced maid moved about deliberately in her hemp-soled sandals; Folly lingered and toyed with her many-coloured fires, and the hands of the clock seemed spellbound.

And Folly noticed only, with a sudden chill, that while he made a pretence at each course in turn, he took not even the specially-prepared broth that she perceived would have been his only dish had he been alone.

“Now for coffee and cigarettes,”—he continued his show of gaiety. “And would you mind having the lights off again? They—they hurt my eyes rather—to-night.” He had a hope that in the darkness he could still keep from her the burning pain that devoured thought and feeling.

## Folly

"I shall like it," said she, "because I want to talk to you, and I always talk best in the dark."

So they were again alone in the red glow, and he made an attempt at smoking, but after a moment quietly knocked out the fire and dropped the cigarette.

"You are too tired," she began, "and it is my fault. It must never happen again."

"I should hope not," he tried to jest. "I shouldn't want you coming every day."

"No, that's over—for a lifetime. But I'm going to tell you what to expect of me."

He tried to laugh, but the sound was so unlike what he had intended that he quenched it in the hasty question: "And what do you expect of me?"

"Nothing," she said, "nothing at all. Provided I can make you happy."

She expected nothing, and yet her fingers sought his, and she drew his hand to her lips and kissed it. And she thought to make him happy, at a time when life could spell nothing but pain. And while she restrained her eagerness to caress, he lacked strength even to respond to her hesitating touch.

"You are cold," she said gently. "Shall I ring for more fire? No? A rug then? I shall not let you be uncomfortable; you don't know what a tyrant of a nurse I can be."

He felt that it was incumbent upon him to say something, to explain, to respond; and he pulled himself together. "It's the excitement, I suppose. I shall be all

## Folly

right to-morrow. Tell me what you were going to say."

"You are trembling," she insisted. "And we should be peaceful now—you and I."

"Yes," he answered. For the moment it was a physical impossibility to say more; but presently—resisting the bitter cry within him, "Can't you let me alone?"—he got out: "I am. Don't worry."

Perhaps some instinct warned her off dangerous ground. "The strange thing is, I knew it the moment I entered the room—the home-feeling, I mean; and I have never had it before in all my life. Even in my husband's house, I always felt somehow like an honoured guest—the way was made so smooth for me, and yet I was not a part of it all. I didn't really belong there. I thought when baby came perhaps it might be different—but we won't talk of that. To-day I understood. It was not what you had done to welcome me; nor even, I think, the fact that you were here, so much as the sense that at last I was needed—there was something for me to do, and for him I loved best in the world. . . . To give all and do all, in that way—what more can happiness be?"

He could not utter his groan: "You are wrong; there is nothing for you to do when pain is master."

Aloud he stammered: "I don't know this new unselfish Folly."

"She's not so different from the old one," she retorted. "It's only a potentiality developing. Before,

## Folly

there was nobody to call it out. . . . I shall be useful, you will see; I can be practical—that's another side you don't know. And I shall begin this moment with a stupid question. Since Gregory has left you, will he throw over the work he has been doing?"

"Don't know and don't care," he managed to say. "What does it matter now?"

She misunderstood utterly. "It matters everything to me. You can go on with his treatment?"

"If I like," he answered indifferently. "There's a decent doctor here; and at Biarritz, of course——"

"Paris," she whispered. "You shall come to Paris with me; and we shall spend every penny we have in the world. . . ."

The pain threatened to get beyond control. Gore's voice was harsh as he interrupted: "It's no good, I tell you. It was too late six months ago. Not a step"—his vehemence ended in a gasp.

"Very well"—she submitted but for the time, he was sure. "I won't trouble you about it any more now. We will take the days as they come"—her voice quivered, but she plucked it up bravely and continued:

"I have all sorts of plans for doing things. I can be your secretary, and I will read to you—Spanish, if you like; only I don't know much. Is there some one who could teach me?"

"One of the Sisters at the Shrine," he got out.

"I will make you happy for a long, long time——"

Long? Every moment was endless to him, while she



## Folly

was in the first flush of her joy. The helplessness of love when the grim forces of the body are at war!

“You will let me do everything I can?”

“I will let you”—he yielded to a momentary shudder—“have your own way in all things.”

“Then I am content,” she murmured, “for my way will be your way.”

“Are you sure of that?” he tried to ask lightly. “That’s still another Folly.”

“There have been so many Follies from the beginning,” she answered soberly. “But I think this Folly is a stranger to them all; and I am sure—she is yours—at your will——”

She laid her head upon his shoulder, and both were outwardly quiet; but he was wondering, with a kind of wild impatience, how he could bring endearments to lips that were stiffened with pain, or caress her when his whole body shrank into one great longing for quiescence; and she was thinking that the flaw must be in herself, that prevented their perfect understanding—the continuance of that exquisite joy that had lasted but a moment, when she first came to him. . . .

He stirred involuntarily and a faint groan escaped him. She sprang to her feet with a tender little cry: “Ah, you are exhausted, and I am keeping you up! You must go to bed. And to-morrow. . . .”

“Yes, to-morrow,” was all he could say.

“You will be better to-morrow!”

## Folly

"I shall be all right. And we can talk again. We shall have all the time now."

"Perhaps I have been troubling you?" There was a real question under her feigned laugh.

Troubling him? His only thought was how to be rid of her quickly, and sink under the burden that he could not bear longer without sign. Her wistful "Good-night, then," was a fresh torture. She longed for kisses; and God! how the thought of all such things sickened him then. Was it perhaps better after all to tell her so in the beginning?

"You—you will be patient at first with a sick man?" he stammered out.

"Yes, oh, yes," she said earnestly, and waited.

He bent his will into a fierce effort to make her go, cursing himself that he had brought her to this pass. But he had not dreamed—the pitiful defence!—that Nemesis could pounce so quickly.

"To-morrow—we shall be happy yet." It was horribly lame; but it was the best he could do.

She was silent a moment, then she spoke cheerfully: "How otherwise? I shall turn on the light now. . . ."

"No, no," he interrupted hoarsely.

"But why—what—Hal, are you in pain? What is the matter?"

"Not at all—nothing—only a little used up, as you have guessed. I shall rest a moment, and then I have something to do before I come up-stairs."

Thereupon she bravely made the best of the situa-

## Folly

tion: "If you don't go soon—and I can see this light from my balcony—I shall come down in my dressing-gown, like any old harridan of a nurse, and scold you as you deserve!"

It was all acting. Each knew it and knew that the other knew. But at least she had got in some measure to feel his attitude.

"It was only a little thing that I neglected—put off doing earlier," he explained.

And she: "Very well. But don't be long about it."

With that she opened the door before he could reach it, looking very pale where the light crossed her cheek. As he stood just within, she was conscious of thinking that the shadows played strange ghastly tricks with a face.

He made a last effort and held out his arms. "I will come soon."

Then she, with her face hidden against his shoulder, whispered: "No, not to-night. You will be better alone. We shall talk to-morrow."

With that she went upstairs, and smiled at her own reflection in the glass. "We shall be happy yet."

She watched until the light below ceased to shine across the street; then after a while went to sleep, smiling, with wet lashes.

As soon as he was alone, Gore opened his bureau and took out a small syringe and bottle.

"Pity I couldn't have taken it sooner; but she would have noticed—she would have been sure to notice. I

## Folly

must try what I can do without her observing anything out of the way. It's never been quite so bad before."

He tore off his coat and cuff, rolled up his shirt-sleeve, and added another prick to the cluster on his forearm.

"It's become a pretty game," he thought, as the pain grew less intense. "All through a moment's weakness. . . . And Greg tried to save us. . . . But there's no use thinking of that. . . . And there's no going back. . . . The only thing to do is to let her have her way—to fight these attacks—to keep it from her all I can—to make her as happy as . . ."

He felt a stupor from the drug overpowering him, and stumbled to his feet, lest she, seeing the light, should come down and find him thus.

All the way upstairs the words kept mumbling themselves over in his brain: "As happy as—as happy as . . ."

He paused at her door for a moment: "I wonder if she is happy?"—there was no sound from within—"or asleep and forgetting?"

He passed on to his own room, in his ears the insistent refrain: "As happy as—as happy as—happy . . ."

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE BARRIER.

“WHAT is the date?” asked Gore, as he moved his face to avoid a sudden flicker of sunlight on the wide couch under the window that faced the street.

“Haven’t an idea. I’ve lost count of time,” answered Folly cheerily, and as if his speaking had stirred her from some train of thought, dropped her work heedlessly on the floor and went towards him.

“Is that my new smoking-jacket you are trampling on?” he demanded, in mock anger.

She rescued it, smiling, and proceeded to shake his pillows.

“Don’t fuss,” he protested. “They’re all right. I shall be up again in a day or two.”

At his impatient movement she desisted, but remained standing by him, with one knee on the couch, staring across the way with unseeing eyes.

In the full sunshine she looked worn—almost as haggard as himself, he thought, with a stir of impatient remorse. Feeling his eyes upon her, she glanced down at him anxiously, with parted lips.

“Nothing—nothing,” he answered her unspoken

## Folly

question. And to his own amazement found himself asking: "Are you happy?"

"Why, my dear"—her voice broke a little, and she fell on her knees and put her cheek to his.

After a time he stirred, and she drew away. Then he said:

"I always supposed happiness dwelt on the mountains—a long climb up, and a swift drop down, and a brief moment of sojourn. And you mean to tell me you are there?"

"Far on the way," she insisted, "oh, very far. I used to think there were many roads, such as fame and wealth and the like, and I tried them all; but they stopped short at the foot of the mountain. So only the way of love remained and I took to that, though it was steep and difficult, and at one time I thought inaccessible; but now I am climbing on, and sometimes the peak is so plain that I can almost put out my hand and grasp it."

"But never quite," he said.

"So far. But what I mind is this. We are both on the same trail, and close together; but more and more I lose you. It is as if clouds rolled between us, and even your voice came to me muffled as through a fog. . . . I have worked the figure to death. Hal, tell me what it is?"

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed.

"You are ill and I am well—can it—does it—make so much difference as that?"

## Folly

"It's the difference between a whole woman and a piece of a man," he said lightly.

"I know. I preferred the piece to the whole of anybody else. And I am content with each day, only I fear—but you won't let me fear. . . ."

"Certainly not," said he. "Why fear?"

"Why?" she repeated. "I fear that I cannot stand it—I mean what I mind is, feeling that you suffer, and being helpless to help, by the very fact of your pain being shut out from your real self. O Hal, you hide it from me; there are times when you bang the door in my face!"

"What have I to hide?"—there was scorn in his laughter. "Would you have me make a fool of myself?"

"I would have you—I think I would have you to be yourself, as if you were alone."

"Folly, Folly!" he answered, with double meaning.

"You can't deny it, can you? That you are acting a part? That there's a barrier between us? That I can't come on the other side?"

"It isn't your time yet to see with my eyes," he said gently.

"Not when I love you so?"

"Perhaps the less for that." He corrected himself hastily. "I mean, you exaggerate the bar, or whatever you call it, between us. There is nothing but—"

"Ah, but!"

"—what must be." His thought was: "I could tell you in a word—death." Aloud he continued: "Come, let's drop it and be merry. Read me *La Voz*."

## Folly

But she shook her head: "First tell me how I fail you?"

"Silly girl!" he raised himself on one elbow, to lend force to his admonition: "You fail in wasting time wondering where you fail."

She would not have that, but sank lower on the floor, and laid her cheek against his hand. "O misery! Hal, can't we break it down?"

He looked at her bent head, smiling absently as he thought: "Break down the barriers that death is so insistently, so irresistibly building? It is like Folly to try."

Aloud he said: "Well, then, let's sum up the situation, if you must; and after that, let it rest. My poor girl, in a word you are disappointed—disillusioned——"

"No!" she breathed fiercely.

"But yes. Naturally, you are too loyal to admit it. You loved a sentient being with a certain amount of brain, of will, of—well, of life-force, say. What have you got? A physical shell, dropping to pieces daily; a burden; a lump; a care and anxiety that gives you no peace. . . ."

"I would not be without it for the world!"

"Not you. But you miss the man you used to know. . . ."

"Not yet, not yet. O Hal, a little longer—for my sake. . . ."

Her distress at once wearied and irritated him.



## Folly

"Well, well, we shall do our best, my girl. But you were speaking of a barrier. . . ."

"Yes, a barrier, that is all," she answered steadily. "You insist that you are not there behind it. That is not true; I will not have it so. You are there; but I cannot find you. With all my love I cannot find you."

He turned away from her to the window. "I don't know—I don't know." What could all this self-analysis matter, when pain was incessant, unendurable?

He remembered suddenly the cry of the old Norseman: "I shall die laughing." It was not so altogether easy when the torture was drawn out over months; but for her sake he made another struggle against the quagmire of melancholy, and essayed a laugh. It was a failure as he knew by her next words.

"You're not worse to-day?" she asked nervously.

As he did not at once answer or meet her eyes, she pleaded: "You are not, I tell you, you are not! Why, yesterday—but to-day you did eat a little, and the doctor said. . . ."

She broke down, but quickly resumed her courage, with an eager: "We must go somewhere for help—Biarritz—Paris—London; there is help in the world!"

"Let a fellow alone, can't you?" The smile atoned for the words.

"Say you're not worse then."

"I'm not worse then."

"There it is, the barrier—so distinct, so impalpable. You fail to understand even my anxiety."

## Folly

He might have answered, "And you my pain?" But instead he clutched at a straw of comfort for her: "You see, we worked several hours this morning. . . ."

"That's it. Of course. How silly of me! I am stupid! You will have some Chartreuse?"

He made a gesture of refusal, but she insisted. He turned away and shielded his face as he drank; but she would not be spared, setting her lips grimly, with the thought: "I must bear to see it. I must go through with it all—to the very end."

"Better now?" she asked, with amazing good cheer. "I thought so. To-morrow you must do less."

"Nothing," he corrected her. "To-morrow I shall be idle—on the sands, perhaps—and you shall read me—what shall you read me? A fairy tale to make us forget the flatness of this daily world—what have we got unread?"

She was wondering as he spoke whether, if once she could climb over that impenetrable thicket in his mind, she should come upon nothing but a sterile plain, or the home-valley with its twinkling fires would await her soul.

She answered softly: "I think you must not be idle altogether. I want you to get on with the 'City of Thorns.'"

"No good," said he cheerfully. "I won't be driven. It isn't worth it."

"I know better," she insisted.

And "I know better," he sparred with her.

## Folly

"Some people will be glad of it—a few, you know. It's worth while pleasing them."

She touched him there, and he turned away.

He could see his neighbour, the Basque woman, on her balcony, scattering crumbs to a flock of chirping pigeons. He thought that she looked pale and unhappy, more than ever like Folly—his Folly. And what was he to do when the tension of life was loosening day by day——?

He was not aware that he had spoken aloud until her arms were encircling him. "I know. I cannot hold you. You're slipping—slipping. . . ."

Still as in a dream he muttered: "It will never be finished anyway."

He was thinking of the poem then. She let him go.

"Italy now—shall we try for Italy in the spring? This Spain is inhospitable—all mountain and desert and sea. Let's get away from the City of Thorns, and walk in the olive-gardens of Fiesole. You shall be Simonetta—you are rather like Simonetta; and I should have to be a new Botticelli, painting you in verses instead of colours; but no, my part is that of Giuliano, who gave up the ghost. . . ."

His wits were surely wandering, she thought. "Don't hurt me so," she implored.

"It's like that old fresco in the cloisters here, death in all its forms steaming up through the earth into the merriment of the feast. A church may be beautiful in its decay, or a house, or a tree—why can't I do the act

## Folly

gracefully? What's the matter? What have I been saying?" He lapsed into the bitterest inner cry upon his selfishness, that struggled with a growing stress upon the need—and the impossibility—of self-control.

"Never mind," she said, with nervous tugging at a hideous woollen fringe on his couch. "I can't stand it"—she caught herself—"this fringe, I mean. Lend me your knife. I must cut it off."

"Cut it off—cut it off," he repeated, looking at her strangely.

"When I think of the future—" she began.

He winced, but it was no part of his penance to add the burden of his self-reproach to what she already had to bear. And yet when he put himself in her place and tried to imagine how it would be with her after he was gone. . . .

"Hang the future!" he essayed.

"Ah, yes, hang the future!"—she followed him. "I could bear to think of it—to think of our separation—if now, while we are together, I could be to you what I thought, what we hoped . . . once when there was no room for hope . . . I could live on through this life, and life upon life, if I thought that in the end we should understand. . . . But I know nothing except that now we are farther apart than before, when we were separated."

"Poor girl"—he pitied her, but he was too weary to reason, or even to follow out her reasoning.

"I can't make them out—the different kinds of love.

## Folly

When I was engaged to Andrew, I was what they call in love with him—I nineteen, he twenty-nine. He ought to have known his own mind; and I think he did. I believe"—she hesitated—"he cares for me now more—at least, in a way you never did."

He had opportunity for protest, but lay silent.

"When we were engaged, I used to ask myself what I liked about him. Sometimes I thought it was his steady eyes; but now I see them as dull and colourless, knowing yours. And again it was his strength, but I hated that after I knew you. He is good. He gave me all he had. Why couldn't I go on caring for him to the end of our days? . . . You came, and at first I laughed to myself at your defects. I said you were little and ugly, and everything that I did not like; but it was all a sham, to hide from myself that there was some quality in you that called forever to me, something that I couldn't escape. But as for Andrew——"

He had to prompt her: "Well?"

"When we were married, I found out what it was I had loved. I'm being honest now. I loved his love of me. I believe many women marry for that."

"But what does it all come to?" he asked.

"Yes, that's what I want to know; I want to sum it up. Why couldn't I stay in the safe circle of his affection? Why did my soul go out to you . . . ?"

"A miserable piddling ugly little scribbler. . . ."

She laid her hand softly on his lips.

"I don't see where it was wrong—where it is wrong

## Folly

now. How could I help coming? But now—O Hal, Hal—the comfort I thought to bring you is no comfort, my love is helpless. . . .”

He tried to soothe her: “Considering how you dose me and feed me . . .”

“Not that way. Don’t talk that way. I can’t bear it.”

“Could you bear it better if I tell you the truth of the situation as I see it?”

He read assent in her pale uplifted face, and continued slowly: “To my thinking, each body-cell has its corresponding spiritual manifestation. A man is a commune of physical forces, a plexus of soul-life inextricably tangled, mutually dependent. And when decay crowds out the one, the other flickers away spark by spark.”

“And after? You leave me no hope,” she whispered; then suddenly buried her face in her hands, but without weeping. “I can’t—bear it.”

He gathered his failing strength into a fierce “You can. Nothing is unbearable, once it is done.” With an effort he raised himself to look at her face. “But it’s killing you to see me go off.”

“No. . . .”

“That it might come quickly!” he muttered, and fell back, gasping.

There was a silence while she cut the offending fringe into fragments. He turned away from her, with indistinct words that she did not hear: “Even a beast crawls away somewhere to die alone.”

## Folly

"What did you say?" she asked; and grew suddenly aware that he was struggling for breath.

It was horrible. For a moment she was too paralyzed to rush to the bell. When she stirred he caught her back in a sort of frenzy.

"No"—it was a sign rather than a word. "Go—away"—she saw the words, even if she did not hear them.

In answer to her appealing arms there was only that terrible word: "Away!"

When she understood that he wanted to be alone in his agony, she went outside and stood at the door listening, and in a blind way praying, until the room was still again.

Then she dared not enter until she heard his voice speaking her name. Fearfully she opened the door and seeing his outstretched hand, ran across to him with a pitiful cry: "You should not have shut me out—you should not!"

"It is kinder to us both," said he gently, "that you should be away when such things happen. Always—until to-day—I have been quick enough. . . ."

"But suppose. . . ."

"We'll not suppose."

"No, you are right," she said quietly. "We'll not suppose. I must obey you in all things."

She passed her hand lightly, caressingly, across his brow, but he made no response by word or look. He was given over wholly to pain.

## CHAPTER XX.

### THE OTHER WOMAN.

THERE came storms late in March, and the sea beat a heavy surf along the *plage*, while the wind twanged wild music from peak to peak of the mountains. But it was on one of these inclement days that Gore, who had been lying silent and almost impenetrable to Folly's utmost efforts, suddenly roused himself and declared that business, more or less important, but hitherto forgotten, called him into the town.

"No," he said in answer to her unspoken appeal, "I don't want you this time, my dear. Call one of those fiacre-things, if you like; it will take me safely enough where I want to go; and when I come back, if you have been very good, I may tell you what I have been up to. But it's not a matter for you to meddle with."

She made little protest; she was becoming used to sitting outside the door of his mind. She arranged everything that she could devise for his comfort, and let him go.

Afterwards she tried to read in the sitting-room; but



## Folly

book after book fell from her lap, and she sat watching the wind-beaten yellow sea until she had fear of her desolation. She tried her bedroom, but this was even more forlorn. With a sudden resolve that was almost instinctive, she rose and went along the passage to Haldane's door. There she paused and was about to knock, but smiled at her own foolishness in forgetting that he was away, and still rather timidly went in.

It was the green arm-chair that she wanted, and the smell of the cigarette-smoke that was so associated with his presence. Sitting there and dreaming, as he was wont to sit and dream, she was conscious of a respite in her trouble, of a momentary comfort that repaid her in part for the care and suffering she had endured for his sake.

After a time she found herself staring at the window across the street, closed against the wind, yet revealing the figure of the neighbour-woman of whom Haldane had told her his fancies. She found herself wondering how long the creature had been sitting so erect and still. She could not be asleep? or dead? A mass of white needlework lay before her on the table; but she did not move to touch it, or stir from her stiff attitude, her elbows on the table, and her face in her hands.

Folly grew anxious and tried to avoid watching, and to think of other things. She had had a letter that morning from Mabel Patrick; and by its happy tone she knew that Gregory had returned, and the wooing was once more on. She was not jealous—but, rather,

## Folly

glad—of their happiness. Mabel could make a man very comfortable by his own fireside, while she—she had a stinging pang at the thought that perhaps after all she had hurt Haldane more than she had helped. Perhaps something might have been done—they might have gone to Paris—they might still go to Paris, only Gregory had been so sure—they had all been so sure—and Haldane himself had been so indignant, so upset, at the bare suggestion of using her money that way—why, he would not even let her pay the bills here. . . . Still, she might have insisted . . . even in a hopeless case. . . . Oh, the woman! The woman! Would she never move?

Haldane had been away an hour and three quarters. He would be tired certainly. The exertion might have overcome him—might have brought on syncope. . . . And yet she could not have prevented him from going. When his will was bent upon a thing, or against a thing, it was not in her power to divert it. . . . She told herself forlornly—and no doubt it was the truth—that this was why she had been in the end submissive to give up all hope of a cure, and to take the days with him as they came.

She paced the floor with increasing anxiety. Should she go in search of him, and where and how? She got her hat and long cloak and returned to the window, looking up the wind-swept street. But then again her eyes were drawn across the way; and full of an unreasonable irritation against the motionless figure, on a

## Folly

sudden impulse she ran downstairs and across the cobbles, and up the rat-eaten mouldy steps on the other side, to the door that she judged should be the right one; there knocked and knocked in vain, until at the last pressure of her knuckles the weak spring gave way and the door opened inward.

She had known what the room would be like, even to the baby on the bed and the unfinished garments scattered about on the chairs. But the woman by the window, with her face hidden in her clasped hands, did not turn or move.

A moment Folly looked at her, noting that the radiant crown of hair, only a little paler than the heavy drop ear-rings that fell against the tawny cheek was indeed, as Haldane had said, like enough to her own. Then she touched her gently on the shoulder, and the woman looked up, heavy-eyed, without surprise or question.

“What is the matter?” asked Folly, in her broken Spanish.

“Nothing, *señora*, nothing.” The answer was in the soft mumble of one more accustomed to Basque than to the resonant tongue of Castile.

“Are you ill?”

“No, *señora*.” She was almost sulky; but as she turned away to the window, perhaps to escape the stranger’s gaze, Folly saw that she had wept until her cheeks were swollen and her eyes would scarcely open.

“Tell me about it,” urged Folly.

## Folly

“The *señora* knows that there is a hospital in the Calle Pamplona? I went there this morning. . . .”

“Yes? Yes?” urged Folly.

“My God, we shall starve—the three of us—the baby and the little one that is to come! They told me I must not work at the machine for months; and I am a shirt-maker. *Señora*, to make them by the hand . . . that is impossible.”

“And your husband?” asked Folly, and would have liked to take the words back.

“Me?” said the woman simply. “I have no husband.”

And Folly waited, seeing that more was to come.

“*He* is a poor man, *señora*, and he has a family of his own; but he has always been good to us and given us what he could spare. He paid for the machine here that I might get work, so that we should never starve. But now he is gone.”

The tears rolled down her cheeks so slowly that they almost seemed to furrow their way. She caught them on her wrist, and wiped them off quickly as if she knew that they would sting.

“And you have no friends?”

“No, *señora*.”

“None?”

“My mother is dead. My father is a respectable man, and has a wine-shop in Deva. *His* family are neighbours, and that is why he brought me away here . . . and at first he paid the rent, but

## Folly

now. . . . It is two years since first I came to Espinal."

"And could you not go into the hospital?" suggested Folly timidly.

The woman shook her head and spread out her palms.

"But what will you do?"

The Basque woman had no answer to that.

With a sudden memory of Haldane, Folly went to the window, opened it and from the balcony looked up the street; but a gust of wind drove her within. The woman paid no attention to her action.

"You must rouse yourself," said Folly sharply.

"Yes, *señora*, yes"—but the tone was lifeless.

Thereupon the baby set up a shrill wail, but his mother sat plucking at her apron as if she had not heard.

So Folly lifted the strong-legged black-eyed child and set him upon her knee, where he at once began ravenously to gnaw at her chain.

"He is hungry. You must feed him," urged Folly.

"What matter, if he must starve sooner or later?" came the apathetic answer.

And Folly looked down at the youngster as he twined his fat brown fist round one of her fingers and drew it to his mouth. He was just such a ruddy solemn-eyed infant as Murillo painted many a time among his cherubs. So looking, she tried to harden her heart against the sinner. The woman had been comfortable and respectable, and she had staked her all on a chance

## Folly

of happiness, and had lost. Let her pay, then, as others must pay. But the innocent child—and the unborn?

“Have you been happy?” she asked suddenly.

“Yes,” said the woman, and her face changed, as if for a moment a light had passed over it. She thought it worth while—perhaps it compensated even for such despair as this. . . .

She rose and put the child into its mother’s arms. “And you don’t know where he is now?”

“But yes—in America. I cannot say the long name of the place I must write to sometimes. Three months and more he is gone. He will be rich one day, and then he will return and give money to the Church. . . .”

“And you will be happy again,” concluded Folly sadly.

“I do not know, *señora*. That rests with the Saints and the Holy Mother. But I wait and I hope. . . .”

And now she seemed to be forgetting her immediate troubles.

“But will not his family go out to him instead?” asked Folly.

“Sometimes he writes that it must be so. I cannot say. But I do not think of that.”

“I will see to it that you do not starve,” said Folly slowly. “Come to us—over the way—until you can work again. It is not fair that *they* should suffer.”

The woman fell on her knees in a passion of weeping, and clung about Folly’s skirts. “May all the Saints pour blessings on you and your husband!”

## Folly

Folly frowned as she stood in the bare room, tall and stately, with her long black cloak gathered about her, and her wide black hat shading her delicate pinched face. Honesty demanded confession, she was thinking; and after a time said coldly: "Thank you. But he is not my husband."

"Ah"—a light broke over the woman's face. "That is better for me. That is why you understand and have mercy."

But Folly drew sharply back. "No, I don't know that I do . . . I can only guess . . ."

The Basque studied her wistfully, then held up the baby towards her. "May God send you this comfort, *señora*; and then you will know. . . ."

But Folly drew back still further, with a little cry; and the woman, thinking that she had presumed, laid the child on the floor, so that it touched the hem of Folly's skirt. So kneeling, she lifted up her hands in prayer to the Holy Mother. . . .

"Oh, hush!" cried Folly. "You don't know"—the sentence ended in a sob.

But the woman prayed with all her heart.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE CASE OF THE NEIGHBOUR.

AFTER all, she had not heard the clatter and tinkle of the mules that brought back the fiacre, and she was amazed and relieved to find Haldane writing at the bureau in their sitting-room.

“So you ran away?” he began, as if to forestall any similar charge from her.

“Yes. I was so tired watching for you, and fearing something might have happened. I have been—gossiping—with your neighbour across the street.”

“Have you now?” He turned smiling, and pushed aside his pen and paper as if the writing were of no importance. “Tell me about her.”

“Yes, presently. You are quite all right? Can I get you anything?”

He whistled a moment, jingling keys and coins in his pockets. “I intended to buy some cigarettes and forgot all about it.”

She opened one of the table drawers. “But I told you this morning I had put a fresh box here.”

She brought him one and offered a light, and continued standing by him, with her hand on his shoulder.



## Folly

"I don't know whether you will consider that I have been good enough. . . ."

"Can't say till I hear what you have been up to."

She came to the point at once: "Well, that woman, you know—she isn't married. And the man has deserted her. She has barely been able to keep from starving; and now she is ill and can't work much for a time. . . ."

"Can't the man be found?"

"He is in America. And he has a family in Deva. And there will be another child soon. So I. . . ."

"Of course you did. To her great gain."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at the way now things come about. He makes a home for her and deserts her. She has a bad time. You step in and act good angel. And the world spins merrily on."

"Is that the way you think about it?" She crossed the room and sat down at one of the windows, looking out at the stormy sea. "Do you suppose he reasoned it all through before he decided to give her up?"

"Hardly. But he doubtless persuaded himself—and her—that he was acting for the best. And Providence—or luck—sent you."

"He stole from her everything that she had, and left her alone," said Folly bitterly.

He turned a shade paler, and fumbled with the cigarettes and matches before he found words: "Does she take it so badly then?"

## Folly

She hesitated, remembering the woman's change of manner when help had been offered.

"Has she had nothing out of it, and is she inconsolable even now?" he followed up his advantage.

She was honest: "No. She has the baby, and she hopes. . . ."

She stopped, not seeing what in her words could have brought that grey look over his face.

"It is nothing," he reassured her. "I haven't had such an outing for weeks. But I shall be the better for it afterward. I must take another soon, and you shall go with me. Some jolly excursion among the mountains—eh? I shall be able to get about more with the turning of the year; I'm a good deal stronger to-day as it is. . . . To return to that woman: you were saying? Ah, yes. Anything that would take her out of herself would serve the same purpose, wouldn't it?"

"I don't know," she answered slowly. "And what else would take her out of herself?"

"Oh, you women, you women!" It was a weak evasion and both knew it.

"Nothing would take me out of myself or console me in such a case," she insisted.

"You are very young yet, Folly," he said, after a silence, "and you lack imagination. Think of the years and years before you. . . ."

"That's exactly what I don't want to think about."

"You'll be happy when you grow old."

"It may be so."

## Folly

"I understand. It doesn't concern you now; nothing does but the present. I suppose a perpetual toothache would kill a man's hopes of immortality. Everything goes down before pain; at least—does it? But there is a remedy."

"Well, the remedy?" she faced him, breathing quickly.

"Draw the tooth. One sharp wrench—then peace."

"It's a beautiful figure," said she ironically, "but what is the tooth in the case of our neighbour?"

"It doesn't apply correctly," he granted, "but on the whole, the man seems to be the tooth; and he has drawn himself—by emigrating."

"Heavens, is that your doctrine?" she spoke hurriedly, as in a sort of fear.

"If they were unhappy together?" he suggested.

"They were not—she was not. But it is possible that he grew tired of her."

"We don't know enough of the circumstances to come out anywhere in our argument. However, if in the long run she is not unhappy. . . ."

"She lives on hope. But in her place I should go mad, I think."

"Even with the child?" he asked anxiously.

"Perhaps—partly—because of the child," she confessed.

A great relief shone from his face; he wiped his forehead, and for a moment held his handkerchief there without speaking. But at last: "I feared you would

## Folly

think otherwise. And you see there are so many other things that can take one outside one's self. . . ."

"Don't go over them," she interrupted brusquely. "I don't want to talk about them. We'll consider the woman saved—and happy, if you like . . . since I am to supply her with bread and cheese. But how about the man?"

"Ah, there you see, we don't know. He may be a villain, or he may be only a poor wretch who could find no other way out."

She was silent, looking seaward, and seeming to listen to the boom of the surf.

"Take another case," he persisted. "If you had a finger almost cut off, hanging by a strip of skin, would you let it be, or call in a surgeon and try to heal the wound?"

"What are you getting at?"—she turned again, in a sort of fright.

"Never mind, then. Let's talk of something else. Oh, you wanted to know where I've been? Do you?"

"Not especially," she answered, from the window. "Not unless you want to tell me."

"I must want to tell you, I suppose, although it's only a stupid matter of business. Come here, girl, and sit by the fire. What's the good of mooning over that beastly sea?"

"I wasn't mooning; I was only trying to imagine how she felt when she knew he was sailing on it—away from her forever—that's all. You want me to

## Folly

come over? Well, what's the stupid business then that I wasn't to meddle with or know about until it was finished?"

He spoke lightly: "A business that every man ought to attend to early in life, and that most men leave until late. I've been making my will."

She bit her lip for self-control, and looked at the red charcoal.

"My father's money all goes, of course, to that perverted charity; but my own, little as it is—I have left that to you, of course. You know how it was earned, and you shall say what is to be done with it. But there is one condition. . . ."

"Must we speak of such things now?" she interrupted piteously.

"Now or sometime. Better now. You are to have all the manuscripts and notes, but not to publish them—understand? Keep them as long as you will, and destroy them before you die."

"I am jealous for your name," she said earnestly.

"It must stand or fall by the little I have finished. This last year's crop must not live after the warped and thwarted mind that produced it. Or would you rather I should destroy them myself?"

"Oh, no, no—mine," she whispered.

He went over to her and kissed her; and they had a moment of understanding and peace.

But then, after a struggle for self-control, she fell a-sobbing, and he had to comfort her as best he could.

## Folly

“You don’t take it properly. Why don’t you admire my enterprise in accomplishing the feat, witnesses and all, in this unbusiness-like land of Spain?”

“You might have let me help,” she said, “or you might have let it slide. Hal—shall we go up to Paris—now that you are a little stronger—to see—to see . . .?”

“I don’t want to be bothered any more,” he said, with unusual sharpness.

“But we’re doing nothing!”

“We’ve done everything.”

“Are you very sure?”

“Sure?”—he laughed it aside. “Everything short of miracle—that’s the only thing left. From your point of view, it’s reasonable to keep on trying, I suppose”—he seemed to forget himself a little—“but as for me, I’m tired of the fuss. I want to be let alone.”

There crept over her the slow conviction that the more she strove to comfort him with her love in his hour of need, the further he slipped away into the shadow, beyond the reach of the utmost she could do.

It was perhaps with a sense of compunction that he again bent over her and stroked her hair, for indeed her case was like to approach that of the neighbour.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AT THE SHRINE.

THE last week in April, Espinal rejoices in the festival of Our Lady of the Thorn-tree. All the balconies are heavy with flowers, and draped with banners and gay carpets. The cathedral bells fill the air with their jangling, and from distant Higuer comes the faint single peal of the Chapel that crowns it. Little girls are tricked out with beads, and their brothers strut about with half-munched pastries in their hands. All the world dances under the limes. . . .

But it is the procession of the Virgin that brings town-folk and country-folk to squeeze one another along the foot-wide pavements of the Calle Mayor, while Our Lady is borne from her shrine on the hill to grace with her presence the cathedral of the city she brought into being; and afterwards returns as she came, followed by a host of pilgrims eager to kiss the sacred thorn, and to dip into the eternal spring of healing that flows from beneath her altar.

Folly was leaning from a balcony of the *fonda*, this too decked out by the pious fingers of their landlady,

## Folly

when she spied, afar off, the hillside streaked with scarlet and purple and gold that moved cityward, to the hilarious outcry of bells.

A while she watched in silence, then called over her shoulder: "Haldane, will you come and see?"

"Is it worth the effort?" he asked. "I'm deep in my book."

But presently he came and stood by her side as the chanting ecclesiastics, with the jewel-decked canopy, passed beneath. Together they watched until the last vestment had turned into the alley of tamarisks that leads to the cathedral, with the people pressing close behind to get the Archbishop's blessing.

"I wish we had thought of it sooner; we might have gone, too," said Folly. "A good man's blessing would have done us no harm."

"We might still join the pilgrimage"—Gore spoke absently, his eyes roving here and there among the crowd—"if you incline to be religious."

She laid on his arm a hand that shook with nervous excitement. "Laugh at me if you will, but I do want to go—I want you to go. I want you to try the spring. You said the other day that there was nothing could save you but miracle. Since then I have prayed night and day. . . . Call it madness, if you will; but let us try. . . . if you love me, Hal. . . . Who knows . . .?"

"Poor Folly—to what lengths would you not go?" he said sadly, rather to himself than to her.



## Folly

“And I have been reading. I have read the Gospels and the Acts, and other books about those that are helped still to-day; and there have been many cured that were much worse than you.”

“No doubt,” he granted idly. “But faith is the first essential.”

“And you——?” she could not say more.

He shook his head.

“Then I might have faith for you. I could—I can—so easily, if it would make you well!”

He smiled at her logic. “Faith is uncompromising—and before the proof.”

She did not stop to consider what he meant. “You will do this one thing for me?” she pleaded.

To himself he said: “It would be a test of my strength—show me at least where I stand.” And aloud: “Folly—more folly! But if it would give you any peace. . . . We might drive up and see what it is like there?”

As she was putting on her hat, struck with a sudden thought she unlocked her strong-box and took out gold-pieces enough to crowd and weight her purse.

They drove through a ruined gate off the route of the procession, not altogether escaping curiosity; but, as soon as they had passed beyond the moat, found themselves in the country among the upspringing maize and bending poplars, alone with the larks.

Slowly they wound along between the apple-orchards and tillage and pasture, up the hillside sprinkled over

## Folly

with the many-coloured slant-roofed timbered Basque houses, all the way the sea being to their left, and the purple mountains, chain beyond chain, to their right, until they reached a level place where the broad road begins to zigzag sharply backwards and forwards across the steep slope, and where an ancient narrow way blocked with great square stones, incredibly uneven in their relations to one another, and worn smooth by thousands of feet, points straight up to the spire of the shrine, passing as it ascends the several stations of the Cross.

Would their Excellencies proceed by the road, asked the driver, or would they prefer to have him wait while they walked up the old way of the pilgrims?

Folly glanced quickly at Gore, and he read her unspoken wish. To please her he bade the driver wait, and offered her his hand, saying:

“Now we take to the foot-path, the old patient way for humble-minded sinners like ourselves—eh, Folly?”

But after all it proved nearly too much for him. It was a jagged and narrow path, steep as befits a road to virtue, he commented with a laugh, when he was forced to rest.

“Look”—he diverted her attention from himself to two hollowed-out places in a great boulder among the artificially-laid stones. “The pilgrims all tread in one another’s footsteps, and the impression is as of one man, isn’t it? It might be a symbol of the succession of generations.”

## Folly

“Shall I call the driver?” she asked anxiously.

But he would not listen to that; and in the end they came out panting, on the terrace before the shrine.

As they sat on the low stone wall under a shelter of fir-trees, they could see the returning procession as a parti-coloured streak on the hill below the city wall.

They were satisfied to wait and look and listen as the spectacle drew near; and as they sat there, talking little and in low tones, they heard an *Adios* behind them and turning, beheld an old priest whom Folly at once greeted as the confessor of the Sisters to whom she, at her first coming, had gone for Spanish lessons.

“You do not take part in the festival?” asked Gore, by way of continuing the conversation.

“Yes, yes, presently, presently. I have a bad foot and it is a long walk to the town.” He, too, sat down on the parapet, with the suffering member stretched out to its own easing. “You English people,” he continued, “are usually interested in our churches. You have seen the Shrine?”

Upon their negative he consoled them: “Another day then, when there is no feast. You are Roman Catholics?”

And as they again said no, he mused as if to himself, with genuine compassion: “What a pity! What a pity!”

Then Folly plucked up her courage and asked, flushing hotly: “Father, is it true that only Roman Catholics are healed at the spring?”

## Folly

He meditated a moment before he answered: "I never heard yet, my daughter, that grace has bounds or limits."

"Could anyone be healed?"

He smiled at her eagerness. "If he had faith?" He put his answer in the form of a question.

"We—we—came—to-day—?" Speech failed her.

But he seemed to understand, for at that he looked serious and said nothing.

She fumbled in her purse for treasure, but he stopped her with something of sternness: "You will not find, my child, that Our Lady of Thorns sells her blessings."

"For your poor"—she was faltering, but he waved that aside: "Out of a full heart shall you give. . . . Come in with the others, my children of this country; and if the Holy Mother has compassion on you . . . who knows?" He smiled and with a salute, strolled away.

"He is a good man," she whispered, "and he believes. You will try, Haldane? For my sake? Oh, I think I have forgotten how to pray!"

She leaned against him, trembling; and so they sat in silence until they heard the breathless chant of the pilgrims climbing the difficult way. Then they rose and went forward a little to meet them; but still looked on from afar, while the priests and choristers passed from the sunlight into the candle-lit church. And still they waited, while some went by that were lame, and others that were bent, and shaken, and

## Folly

scabbed by horrible diseases; and some that were idiots, with death's heads that wagged and grinned; and some that were blind; and some that were carried by two or three. When these were gone within, with a great band of friends come to pray with them, the tiny church was full; and yet outside the roadway was as crowded with spectators as if the number were undiminished.

The two who stood apart listened to the chant of prayer and psalm, within and without, as they watched the sun sinking in a lemon-coloured sky streaked and blotched with cloud-masses as purple as the mountain-peaks on which they rested. . . . It seemed to them equally impossible to go in and to go away.

Presently they heard the click of an iron gate and looking down, perceived that they were just above an outside door that led from the crypt. Both drew back as a young girl, flushed and wet-eyed, with water-drops on her dark hair, came up the steps, followed by a group of weeping women.

For her life, Folly could not have refrained from leaning forward with the hushed cry: "You—are you——?"

The girl stopped and stared and shivered; then a light came over her face. "Healed!" she whispered back; then broke into a sweet shrill hymn of praise to Her that had wrought the wonder.

At this, Folly waited no longer, but seized Gore's

## Folly

hand, and had dragged him to the church door before he realized what she would be at.

"No, no,"—he frowned at her, as the kneeling crowd stirred and made room for them.

But in her madness was an impetus that brooked no resistance. People bent aside for them, perhaps divining that here was some unusual thing, so that it almost seemed as if a path opened before them as they went, until they found themselves at the top of the dimly-lighted stairway into the crypt, on which crouched, knelt, and lay, the procession of those going down to be healed. From below came the chanting of the priests as they cried for mercy on the sick; from above, the responses of the congregation, shrill with many women's voices, quivering with excitement and an indefinable suggestion of tears.

Gore perceived that there was no restraining Folly, carried away as she was by the religious ecstasy of the peasants about her; and half sick, half disgusted, yet unwilling to leave her, unable to drag her away, he leaned against the damp wall, and watched the slow downward progress of the afflicted. Presently he became conscious that the step below him was empty of the leprous-looking man who had been kneeling there, and that two bearers with a paralytic between them were pushing hard behind.

Folly turned to him with brilliant eyes. "Come. It can do no harm."

"Where are your beads and your mass-book?" he

## Folly

whispered back; but at her look, suffered himself to follow her down the dark way. "If it would satisfy her, why not?" he asked himself.

The spring, if spring there were, was built in and roofed over with a golden tabernacle. Facing the source of miracles was an altar surrounded by iron standards filled with hundreds of tapers; and these filled the crypt with a golden haze, and were reflected in many colours in the jewels of the Shrine. The yellow light of these candles innumerable outlined the black frocks and sallow faces of half a dozen young ecclesiastics, who with outstretched arms monotonously—in- sistantly—repeated the orisons that echoed up the stair-way. An old priest—the same who had spoken to the strangers on the terrace outside—was muttering some ceremonial procedure, while two acolytes were ready, one to hand out a cup containing the precious liquor, the other carrying a basin and napkin, to sprinkle or to lave, as the father might direct.

The leper was turning away with dripping face and hands, when Folly, her lips parted in the effort to draw breath calmly, advanced to the rings of candle-flame.

The acolytes looked at her inquiringly, but the old priest nodded toward the man; he was accustomed to illness in many forms.

And singularly enough, at this moment, Gore's one sensation was of a parching thirst that seemed to swell his tongue and intensify the aching of his throat an hundredfold. He had no more hesitation than a way-

## Folly

side beggar in reaching out for the double-handled antique silver cup.

The sparkling water—cold and faintly, deliciously sweet—was a veritable godsend to him; but almost at once he found himself quelling the suspicion that perhaps it was medicated to produce an immediate effect of stimulation.

When he turned to Folly, however, he found her kneeling on the stones, with her arms outstretched like those of the young priests, and her lips moving in response to their prayers.

“Come, come,” he muttered roughly, “it’s high time we got away from this.”

They stumbled up the outside stairway, where was now assembled a little awe-struck crowd, constantly recruited from the worshippers in the church, to watch the return of the healed and to sing praises in their behalf.

They made no difference in the case of the strangers; but some of the women pressed forward and demanded what was the miracle that had been wrought.

And when they made no answer, there was a certain mumbling of discontent among the old people; and a rude joke or two passed along the lips of the young folk. Therefore, instead of making their way onward through the crowd, with one accord they faced up the hill; and leaving the road, took to a steep narrow path that led through rock-strewn heath land towards a ruined square tower on the summit, erected long ago for watching or defence.



## Folly

But before they had climbed half the distance, Gore dropped exhausted on a boulder; and Folly, with her shoulder behind him for support, knelt in the heather at his side. She slipped her hand into his and together they gazed at the shadowy ranges of the Pyrenees, from the green foot-hills in the plain below to the purple peaks that vanished among the approaching clouds.

Suddenly she released her hand and hid her face, saying bitterly: "The fool—the fool I am!"

"It was rather like storming the gates of heaven," he admitted.

"It was that; but if we had got in—ah! And now we shall be punished for our presumption."

"I don't know what made me drink," he mused.

"I—I did," she insisted. "I dragged you there."

"Perhaps—but yes, I do know why I drank. I had a deadly thirst; and the water was very good."

"Oh, hush, it's blasphemy!"

"Why so? I may be the better for it."

"No, no, you will never be better," she said, in low-voiced despair.

"But, my dear girl, what did you expect? A cure on the spot?"

"I don't know. I don't know what I expected. I am at my wits' end."

"Clearly. Then, can't you let yourself be content to let things work themselves out as they must?"

But she still brooded: "We are taught to believe in miracles. I thought this was a supreme test."

## Folly

"Miracles there are undoubtedly, but they happen in the soul; and the soul is the source of half the maladies of mankind. I mean it literally. And these are cured by faith. But with me it's a war of cell against cell. Like must meet like in the struggle for life and death. Hence, faith is the strong opponent of unfaith, poison of poison, microbe of microbe. And we live or die by the winning of the stronger. So why trouble? . . . You must bend to the inevitable."

"No!" flashed from her lips, her eyes; her whole body breathed protest unending.

"No, you never would, I suppose. It isn't in your nature. You possess the doubtful virtue of not knowing when you're beaten."

"Oh, you talk of virtue!" she cried bitterly; and then turned to pleading: "For my sake, Hal, don't give up. I can't stand it. You are all I have or want in the world."

He looked at her sadly enough, his exhilaration followed by a profound depression. "There you are wrong—we are wrong; you should have or want other things." He put his arms about her. "You struggle and you struggle, beating your wings against the laws that cage us all in. Give over."

She clung to him, breathing hard. "I cannot face the thought of the future."

"You need not, you should not. The angels of the future are jealous of the treasure they guard." He

## Folly

added to himself: "But it's the present that's killing her—God! to make an end of it!"

"Up to to-day," she continued, "I had some wild hope. I thought that Providence—something—would intervene—I have always found the way before. . . ."

She rose as if to continue her climb to the tower overhead, that looked still as inaccessible as it had seemed from the shrine below. But after a few steps she stopped, knee-deep in the heather, the sea-wind ruffling her hair, and stretched out her arms to the mountains. "I would worship any God—any—that would save us to each other!"

He made no answer. She turned and found him struggling for breath.

Her arms were quickly about him, but with a gasp or sign, "Let be," he slipped from her hold down among the heather.

She looked at him, with a strange cold sense that the inevitable punishment had been swift.

Then she put her hands to her mouth, and gave a shrill call for help—once—twice—which brought a herd-boy running over the brow of the hill.

With a kind of detached interest, she watched him crossing himself in prayer, as she set forth briefly what had happened and what they must do.

Gore was unconscious when they lifted him between them, and bore him down the winding path to the deserted road that led to the shrine.

Here, when her desperate strength would have carried

## Folly

her yet further, the herd looked at her face and was wise. He insisted that they lay down their burden, and that she keep guard while he went for help.

He had not gone twenty steps before he encountered two soldiers, raw conscripts from the fort over the hill, on leave to see the *fiesta*.

These understood and were quick of foot and hand; and so quietly displaced Folly, and left the herd to return to his goats.

She never knew what she said to them, or how she rewarded her first helper; but she remembered as in a dream walking between throngs of people, and finding somehow, somewhere, the waiting cab. And she remembered directing the men to put up the hood and to place Haldane so that she could support his head; and then giving them something that turned their faces ruddy with delight.

All the way to Espinal, as they drove between the maize-fields, she found herself thinking coldly that this was the end—it was surely the end, and nothing mattered. . . . And there crept into her mind a sort of dull wonder that she could bear it so well.

But still he did not die; and as they drew near the city walls, while she was chafing his hands, he returned to a show of consciousness.

“For my sake,” she whispered, with white lips. “Fight for it.”

He looked at her with a sort of dumb reproach. Had

## Folly

he not been fighting far beyond his strength, to the limit of his will, these last six months?

“Did you think I was done for?” he got out presently.

“I thought it was my punishment,” she said.

“For fighting nature? And still you urge me on? How many more times do you want to go through with this—eh? Do you suppose it will become easier with repetition? How long——?”

“Oh, hush,” she said. “I am thankful for this little gained.”

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE FERRY.

HE was really wonderful, she told him almost gaily, when she came downstairs the day after the festival and found him already at his desk.

He gave brisk replies to her anxious questions, and even teased her about her more than maternal solicitude.

"You're the only boy I've got," she defended herself; and that put an end to his joking.

But she little dreamed what was in his mind, as he sat apparently absorbed in his letters. After a sleepless night, during which he had revolved a score of times every phase of their situation and every possible way out of it, he rose early and went downstairs, resolved that never again should she have to pass through the experience of the day before; and found on the table a letter from Gregory that offered a solution. "It would be barbarous," he said to himself, "yet it is possible—perhaps the only way. And the time has come."

The arresting passage in the letter contained only a few drily-stated facts: "Christie is at Biarritz. He

## Folly

gave Mrs. Patrick his address, and she assures me that she knows he intended you to have it. I don't know how she knows; but she insists that I send it on to you. Make what you will of it."

"I must think it well over," he mused; but for a long time could get no further than: "That was always the stumbling-block—leaving her desperate and alone in a strange land. But how to manage?"

Unconsciously Folly helped in the sealing of her own future. She said:

"I have a letter here from Mabel. She writes that Gregory knows a man who has been very successful in treating—cases like yours. Some Frenchman—wait a moment; I'll find the name. He has recently opened a sanatorium at Elizondo. Evidently Gregory approves the plan, or, you see, Mabel wouldn't suggest it."

"That we go there?" he asked. Would she never understand that it had been too late a year ago?

"I was only thinking that, since you are better this morning, I might go and look over the place. I could do it in a day; and if it seems advisable. . . . We can't stay here much longer—away from everything"—he interpreted rightly the distress in her voice; in the event of further crises, she wanted every possible means of prolonging life.

It was fully time to act, he thought, studying the Biarritz address; yesterday had proved it. Then he said aloud: "It might be a good plan. You will go to-day then?"

## Folly

He gave himself up to a mathematical problem. If she should depart by the ten o'clock ferry and diligence, she would have ample time for the one-seventeen train; and if he telegraphed to Christie so that he could get the eleven-something from Biarritz, they would be bound to pass on the way. And if the diligence drivers stopped to chat and smoke a cigarette, as they often did, the two passengers would doubtless recognize each other. . . . He could not see any way out of that; he must take the chance. But after all, such a meeting might involve a possible solution. If Christie came by a later train, the two travellers would probably meet at Erro station. This would not mend matters, and would endanger the further plan of action that he was rapidly forming.

He hesitated no longer, but sent his telegram when Folly had gone upstairs to prepare for her journey.

Then, haunted by the sense of what he was doing, he followed and knocked at her door.

She was so amazed to see him there that he felt bound to trump up an excuse. "I came to tell you"—he said, and stopped.

Perceiving that she was about to tie her shoe, he suggested, "Let me," and had knelt before she could prevent him.

When he had done this, to his own amazement and hers, he laid his head on her knee.

"Why, my dear!" she exclaimed. "You're not so well then? I won't go."



## Folly

But he looked up at once. "You shall go. Why not? I'm all right."

When she made no answer beyond looking at him keenly, he rose and fetched her cloak, and held it out to her to put on, saying: "You will miss the ferry."

As she slipped her arms into it, he suddenly drew her back, cloak and all, and kissed her with an intensity of emotion that he had never shown before.

"Why, Hal"—she was frightened by his strangeness—"what is this? You are surely worse? I will stay at home to-day."

With that, he conceived the necessity for acting, and played his part so well that she was reassured, only wondering that he should linger about and watch her as she arranged her hat and veil, and found her gloves and purse.

"I will walk to the ferry with you," he said; and when they came down into the garden, picked a flower and gave it to her—a strange red blossom with a purple heart, the name of which neither knew.

They walked slowly along the empty street that echoed the sound of their footsteps; and after a little while, he took her arm and drew it through his.

She mistook the action for weakness, and pretended to push him away. "Go home. You will tire yourself."

"No," he answered; and looking into her face, asked: "You trust me, do you?"

"Yes," was all she said.

## Folly

“Trust me always.”

Her face grew heavier with trouble, and he hastened to forestall her words:

“My dear, I do honestly assure you that you need not worry about me to-day.” He added under his breath: “Or after—or after. God grant it!”

“I should not go,” she said anxiously, “only, you see—you see, it’s another hope. . . .”

They passed under the ruined gate; and just beyond met the goat-herd with his brown flock. The man stopped his piping and entreated custom.

Gore shook his head, but Folly said, “Please—to please me; it will do you good,” and he yielded.

The herd stooped to his milking, and the shaggy flock browsed here and there among the cobbles. When the glass foamed over, said Gore: “Let us drink it together, you and I, in earnest of drinking together one day the cup of joy.”

She barely touched the glass, and then he; and they looked at each other and laughed, she with tears in her eyes.

“We must try again,” he said, and they made a ritual of it, drinking alternately until the glass was empty.

So for a moment they stood poised, it seemed to him, between the City of Thorns and the sea—the last moment they should be together in this world of men. . . .

“The ferryman is waiting,” she murmured softly;

## Folly

and they passed along to the end of the rough stone causeway over the sands, where Kiki, the wrinkled Basque, sat patient on a thwart. She was to be the only passenger, it seemed.

"Is not the *senor* coming too?" asked the oarsman.

"Yes," cried Gore, suddenly unable to resist the temptation; but she was firm and, laughing, held him off with both hands. So they stood another long moment, she in the boat, he above on the causeway. Then there came a strain upon their clasp; and looking down, he saw a foot of water between them.

"The *senor* wishes to come?" asked the ferryman again, prepared to lay hold of the pier.

But Folly was vehement. "No, no, you misunderstand," said she in Spanish. "He cannot come." And to him in English: "Go home and rest. And don't meet me to-night or wait up for me. There's no telling when you will see me again."

He had hesitated while he might have leaped, and now a wide stretch of water was between them.

He strained to catch every look of her face, long after its features were blurred together; and as if fascinated by his intentness, she gave him gaze for gaze until she reached the opposite landing. Then he saw the flutter of a handkerchief and she was gone.

He made a hasty movement and looked upstream and down; but he knew well that none of the fishermen came so far within, and that by the time the ferry returned, the diligence would be gone. . . . He was

## Folly

alone, dizzy with the sun beating on the sands, and in his ears the shrill piping of the goat-herd, softened to a plaintive tenderness, far up in the City of Thorns:



## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE ONLY WAY.

NOT long after Gore had returned to the inn, a telegram was brought to him, containing the words: "Coming by eleven-fourteen train. Christie."

During the hours that intervened, he was busy enough; but when his visitor was announced, between three and four, he told the *señora*, who passed him in the hall, that everything was pretty well ready.

As he opened the sitting-room door, he saw the Basque maid on the stairway, and called her to give some nonchalant and seemingly insignificant order; then went in, his hands in his pockets, perhaps to emphasize a slight air of bravado, and closed the door by leaning against it.

Christie returned his nod, and awaited in silence what he might have to say for himself. He was standing by the window as Gore came in, and did not advance, or take the offered chair. Nor did Gore meet him more than half way, as he faced him, leaning on the table more heavily than Christie knew.

"The point is," began Gore abruptly, as if the matter had been previously under discussion, "I

## Folly

asked you to come here to-day because I am leaving Espinal.”

This sentence was meaningless to Christie, and he made no comment.

“The ferry goes in less than an hour, so I must be quick and plain. In a word, I am deserting—her.”

“You”—Christie’s fist clinched, and he jerked sharply about; then he remembered the other man’s weakness and controlled himself. “May I ask why I am honoured with this communication?”

“Certainly. When you know the facts, you may wish to take her back.”

He had got it out now, and was able to walk up and down with more ease of mind, while awaiting the response.

But Christie was slow to say: “I expected a different state of affairs; I can make no sense of this.”

“You expected to find me dying; well, so I am, and that is why I am going away.”

“What else?” asked Christie, as he paused.

“What else? Why, I hardly know. It is for you to put questions. I have stated the case to you; and I have written to her.”

“Have you any reason to believe—that she would wish to be taken back?”

“None whatever,” Gore was forced to confess.

“She does not wish it then? She chose to leave me; if she comes back, it must be of her own free will.”

“Suppose she should be willing, how could she know that the door is open?”

## Folly

Christie turned upon him keenly: "Well—first and last—I take it, I am her husband."

"Is that enough?"

And Christie: "By this time she ought to know something of me."

"And you of her?" asked Gore.

"I don't care to discuss that with you," said Christie curtly. "I gather you are wanting to be rid of her?"

"You are wrong," said Gore calmly. "I have already given you a sufficient reason for my act; but I can tell you more. You speak of being her husband; well, so you are, as much so as when she left you six months ago. She has been playing nurse to a captious invalid, and that's the end of the matter."

Christie looked at him hard, to get the truth.

"Believe it at your leisure. Yes, it's been a fizzle—or rather, I have—from the beginning; and I don't enjoy admitting it. But it seems the only straight thing to do. Now do you wonder that I want to save her still if I can?"

It seemed long to both before Christie muttered under his breath: "The folly of it!"

"That's it"—Gore laughed and choked, and leaned heavily over the back of a chair. "The Folly of it, oh, the Folly of it!" He asked suddenly: "Did you by any chance pass her on the way?"

"I saw a woman I thought like her; but it was only a glimpse. The diligence did not stop. And she was not looking at me."

## Folly

“I have taken advantage of her absence,” said Gore, drawing out his watch. “I want to get away at four-thirty. I decided weeks ago that this must be the end sooner or later; but I didn’t reach the point until yesterday. She’ll have some chance of getting over it, once I am gone; but this dragging business—with six months more of it, Lord, she’ll be done for herself! You see?”

“I begin to understand,” said Christie; but was by no means clear of his bewilderment.

“I couldn’t find a decent way until I heard you were at Biarritz, by a piece of luck. . . .”

“Luck!” echoed the other.

“Well, whatever your business was; it’s no affair of mine. But I tell you it gave me my clue. I couldn’t have left her here alone. . . .”

All at once Christie awakened to a certain grasp of the situation. “So you propose to sneak off and get me to face the music?” he demanded, with a brutality the more amazing for his previous quietness. “Is that it?”

“That’s one way of looking at it,” said Gore, though his colour wavered and paled. “You may think it cowardly . . .”

“Damned cowardly!”

“But to me the greater cowardice is staying on.”

“I’m no judge. As a rule, I don’t run away,” said Christie coldly.

“By God, man——” began Gore, but remembered



## Folly

that the other could not be expected to know what he knew; so fell silent again.

“And what part do you propose that I should play in this little game?” asked Christie.

“I propose nothing. You have the facts.”

“Very few,” objected Christie, “very few. Your side of the story. Perhaps I ought to wait . . .”

“If you have anything more to ask,” said Gore impatiently, “be quick about it, for I have no intention of losing my boat.”

“She does not suspect this—act of yours?” Self-restraint made visible marks on Christie’s face.

“Not to-day, at least; but she cannot be altogether unprepared for something of the sort. She may think I could not do it.”

“And if I wash my hands of the matter, and return to Biarritz by the next train?”

“You are a just man,” answered Gore, “and you will put the blame where it belongs.”

“On you?”

“On me.”

“Were you then responsible for her coming here?”

“Certainly I could have prevented her staying.”

“And that you did no more mischief . . .”

“Is my misfortune and your gain. I intended no generosity.”

“And now you are going where?”

“That does not matter, I think. I shall not cross your path again.”

## Folly

He read for a moment a hot curse in Christie's eyes, that he had ever crossed their path; but this faded almost as it came.

With an effort, Gore went on to practical details of times and arrangements; and when at last he paused for breath, Christie said:

"Thanks. I should not have supposed you to be a poet."

"Not all poets are fools," began Gore, then turned his sentence with a laugh, "but perhaps I am not a poet. The point is, is there anything else?"

"I think not," said Christie after a moment, and paused again. "I came to Biarritz anticipating that there would be trouble; but I certainly never expected anything as singular as this."

"We are rapidly restoring it to the normal," said Gore. "Well?" He was obviously waiting for his visitor to go.

But Christie appeared to think that it devolved upon him to say something: "I hope that you . . ."

"Thanks—don't trouble."

They looked at each other, keenly aware of the awkwardness of their position; but Gore contrived an ironic smile. "You're not playing up to your part as the injured husband."

"Hang it!" said Christie, and held out his hand.

Gore shrugged. "How can we?"

But Christie did not withdraw.

## Folly

Then Gore was ashamed of his hesitation. "After all, you win," he declared. "Mark my words."

"I shall meet her at the ferry," said Christie, taking up his hat and preparing to go.

But Gore stopped him. "I say," he continued, with a curious perplexed smile, "I can't very well ask you to be gentle with her; but after all——" he brushed his hand across his eyebrows.

"We are in the same boat, would you say?" asked Christie.

Then Gore found his jest: "No—I shall be aboard Charon's—I mean Kiki's—in ten minutes."

"It was the straight thing," said Christie huskily; and afterwards, now and again, wondered to the end of his days whether Gore had heard.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### HUSBAND AND WIFE.

It was long past twilight when Folly returned. From the shadow of the gateway, Christie saw her climbing up the sandy road, then retreated and followed her until she had entered the inn.

He gave her a little time—measuring it by his watch under a light that projected from a balcony above—time enough to miss Gore, not time enough to learn the truth.

He had himself announced by name; and she came to meet him, her eyes flashing in her white face: “He is dead?”

“Oh, no, no,” he answered, with sudden uncontrollable impatience. “Don’t be absurd. But I have come to take you home, if you will.”

She shrank away from him. “Why? Where is he?”—her voice grew shriller.

“Be quiet, and I will tell you,” he said, hoping by sternness to soothe her.

She looked at him piercingly; then suddenly lost her self-command, rushed to him and seized his arm: “I have been quiet too long. Tell me—tell me! You shall

## Folly

tell me! I shall shriek—I shall—tell me what has happened!”

“Not while you are in this state,” he answered grimly.

She sank in a huddle on the floor at his feet, and with her thumbs pressed against her forehead, rocked herself backwards and forwards in abandonment to her grief: “O Andrew, have mercy!”

He seized her wrists and held her still, saying with deliberate scorn: “You are not on the stage.”

She was quiet then, but she did not rise: “Tell me.”

“He has gone away,” said Christie, as gently as he could.

“You mean he has—left me?” she breathed; and upon his assent, gave a low cry: “Ah, I knew—I knew it would be so!”

He was silent, helpless to console, and angry at his own helplessness. But he pulled her unresisting to her feet, and put one arm about her to keep her from falling.

“Will you come home?” he asked again.

But she seemed not to have heard. “Tell me more,” she pleaded; and was very still while he, judging that the simple truth would be least grievous, went through the tale as he understood it.

“Then,” she said, by way of conclusion, “then there is nothing to be done?”

“Unless you try to follow him,” he suggested keenly.

“Not again,” she whispered. “You said there was a letter?”

## Folly

"One moment," he urged.

She had walked away and laid her hand on the copper ring of the bureau; but she turned again.

"There will be time enough for that." He had a definite theory that it would not do yet to leave her alone with her trouble. "You must answer me first. What do you intend to do?"

"I don't know."

"You can't stay here."

"No."

"Where will you go?"

"I don't know."

"You must find out and tell me," said he brusquely. She said nothing.

"Come, come, this won't do. You must rouse yourself." He assumed harshness.

She laughed a little at that. "It's what I told the woman across the way; and when I gave her money, she was cheerful again. Her lover deserted her, and—I heard her singing yesterday."

He thought her crazed with grief, and said gently: "I don't want to trouble you; but you must let me take charge of everything now. . . ."

"You!" she cried astonished.

His face flushed, as he said more passionately than she had ever before heard him speak: "By God, who has a better right?"

She was silent, fumbling to open the drawer.

He swung her fiercely round to face him. "Not yet.

## Folly

Look here, I've asked you twice before. Will you come home with me?"

She turned wide eyes upon him. "You asked me that? I did not hear. You would take me back again?"

He did not deem further assurance necessary.

"After all this—this——?"

Still he held her attention by waiting.

"But I have treated you abominably . . ." she began.

"Well?" He did not deny her self-accusation.

"You could forgive that?"

"You are my wife. Answer me."

"Some men would have gone into the divorce courts for less," she said, as if to herself.

"Have I sufficient grounds?" he asked. The question was at once involuntary and irresistible.

"No," she said, without further attempt at self-justification; and did not seem surprised when he answered: "I knew as much."

"Let me go," she breathed.

"Not yet—not yet," he said grimly, feeling that almost the worst of his punishment was to have to seem to punish her. "I want you to know that, in any case, my offer would have been the same. But—will you come?"

"You can force me to go, by law, I suppose," she answered indifferently.

"Am I likely to do that?"

"No"—she considered these bubbles on the surface,

## Folly

with her life-joy at the bottom of the deep waters.

“No, you are too proud; but you could by right . . .”

“Have I always claimed my right?”

“No; you are good—good.” She pleaded again:

“Oh, if you are good, let me go now!”

He seized her hands. “I don’t trust you.”

She turned her face away, with a tearless sob; and all at once pity overcame him. He drew her close and laid her head on his shoulder. “There now, have it out—can’t you?”

But she tried to free herself. “I want my letter.”

Then he pushed her away so violently that she almost fell; and as quickly made a movement to catch her. “You’re too much for a man—too much for me, anyway! I’ll not leave you until you have answered my question——”

“No!” said she, sharply.

“You won’t come? Very well. That settles it. Will you go to the mater?”

She shook her head.

“Well, will you name somebody to whom you will go?”

She was calmer now. “Either I should be a burden to them all, or they would misjudge me. . . .”

“You know the mater’s boast that as a judge’s daughter she keeps clear of the Bench. As for myself—good Lord, don’t bother about me!” His tone was not far from irony. “And as for other people . . .”

“I’d rather stay here,” she interrupted suddenly.



## Folly

“And fret yourself to death? Well, I don’t propose to let you, so there’s an end of that. We must find another way.”

But in truth he was at a loss. He ran rapidly over the possibilities, but could not find one that he thought would serve her in this hour of need. And left to herself, she had every temptation to take her own life, and lacked not the courage, as he well knew.

“There is a way,” she said, after a pause. “The Sisters up on the hill—they would be kind. They care for sick people. I don’t know whether they would have me . . .”

He knitted his brows over this unexpected solution.

“They would understand what it is to die and yet live on and on.”

Still he said nothing, and she concluded wearily: “I could be quiet there. It’s all I want—to sink out of sight. I’m sorry to be such a trouble to you. You can wash your hands of me then.”

“Have your way,” he said at last. “That must do for the present. Later on . . .”

She escaped from him and found the envelope that she had been seeking in the bureau drawer. “Later? There is only *now* for me.”

She was about to go upstairs when he laid a clenching hand on her shoulder: “You must promise me to do no harm to yourself.”

“Don’t—you hurt me”—she shrank from his grasp.

## Folly

“The harm has been done, I think; but I promise. I will not shirk the future.”

With one more word he let her go. “Remember,” said he, “when you are ready to see me again, I shall be waiting outside your door.”

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### THE SISTERHOOD.

DURING the month of May, Folly almost lived in the garden of the Sisters, that hangs on the steep hill overlooking Espinal. But she haunted not so much the little square in front of the house, with its stiff beds of begonias and geraniums, and rows of oleanders, as the old wild slope with the brook tumbling through it in cascades along a mossy track of boulders to the Itsu in the valley below. Here she found plum-trees and cherry-trees, gnarled and bent, as if under their weight of bloom, and a few hoary olive-stumps, and wild flowers growing among the sprawling ivy and bramble. It is to other gardens as a ruin among houses; and perhaps that was why Folly preferred to sit there, on the stone wall at the lower margin, where the road is cut through the rock beneath—to sit there and look down upon the valley that had seen the efflorescence and withering of the passion-flower of her life.

The Sisters were troubled about her, because she was so silent, and would not leave her to the solitude that she craved. They would come out, one after an-

## Folly

other, demure little figures in their black garb, with the broad white collar and the gleam of Virgin blue under the head-dress; and when she wanted most to be alone, they would talk to her about the garden and the spring and their poor folk down in the city.

Still she loved them all, and at times listened willingly to their chatter, and tried to make answer as if she were one of themselves.

But that was difficult, for talk as they would, they always came sooner or later upon some stumbling-block of faith, or habit of thought, that drove them apart, so that they could only look at each other wistfully across the gap and wonder why God had made souls so different.

With Sister Christina, Folly tried first to speak of her trouble. She was an exquisite young Andalusian, with big burning eyes that still shed tears when she spoke of her mother. "I can remember coming home with her through the vineyards, with baskets on our heads, and the air full of the smell of the grapes. And she sang little songs—ah, and I shall not see her again in this world!" And although she might not give way to her weeping, she would look at times so sorrowful and so home-sick that Folly felt sure she would understand her own grief and longing.

"But no," she said, "it is a sin to feel so. We must submit us to God's will and be happy."

"And be happy," Folly repeated. "Sister, Sister, even you cannot always do that."

## Folly

"That is because I am so sinful," was the prompt answer.

"And yet you do not know—had you a lover?" pursued Folly, forgetting to be kind.

"Heaven defend!" answered the little nun, all a-blush.

"Then you know nothing about my trouble," said Folly.

They were walking in the cloister that adjoined the chapel, and had reached a splendid broken tomb cut into the wall.

"Who was she?" asked Folly, pointing to the effigy.

"A patroness of ours—I do not know how many hundred years ago. And I forget her name. But she was daughter and sister to a king, and mother of many princes; and when she was young they say she was so wicked that the friars used to call down judgments on her head; and suddenly she repented, and gave all her wealth to this house, and died here very holy."

"And what were the sins of her youth?" asked Folly.

"Ah, that the Mother would never tell us," said Christina. "She read it to us out of a book and she always skipped that part. I know, because Sister Eulalia stumbled upon it one day; but she never told me what it was. But still, as soon as you repent of your sins you will be happy. I always am."

"I am going to say a wicked thing, Sister," answered Folly. "I believe that she"—she pointed to the effigy in ruff and farthingale, jewels and high-heeled shoes—

## Folly

“was happier in her conscienceless days when life was love and love was life, than after, when she graced your foundation here.”

“You think that?” said Christina. “Oh, I must go and do something I had forgotten.” And she fled away shocked.

With Sister Teresa, Folly alluded to this same sinner and benefactress of old; and the sombre-faced nun answered:

“She went down into the deeps to find salvation. It comes in many ways—even through sin.”

“How through sin?” asked Folly.

“Scourge thyself and thou wilt know,” said Teresa, harsh-voiced and fierce in her admonition.

“But how?” Folly persisted.

“Give thyself no peace. Drive thyself to do the things thy soul loathes, all the days and all the nights . . .”

“That is not living,” protested Folly, roused even to indignation.

Teresa’s face blossomed into a sudden smile. “It leads to life beyond life,” she said.

But Folly left her, thinking sadly: “That is her way, not mine. As we are all different, there must be a separate path for each of us; but to find it—how?”

In her quest she turned to Sister Ursula, whose face wore always a tranquillity that it seemed no joy or distress could change.

## Folly

"Tell me, Sister," said Folly one day, "does nothing ever trouble you?"

"How could I be troubled?" was the calm reply.

"But some of us poor folk out in the world are always asking: 'How not?'"

Ursula spread forth her arms, with a sudden gesture of welcome: "Then leave the world and come to us."

Folly closed her eyes, and tried to see herself in the blue and black garb, shut in forever with the self that was her chief torture; and in that moment she knew that the picture was impossible.

"But what should I do here to keep an untroubled mind?" she asked.

"For me, it is enough to pray, and to contemplate the Goodness of the Father, the Sacrifice of the Son, the Comfort of the Holy Spirit, the Beatitudes of the Virgin, the Glories of the Saints. . . ."

So far had Ursula gone, rapt in her recital, before she noticed that Folly had sunk on one of the stone benches, and was weeping bitterly:

"O Sister, Sister, I am all different! And I rebel against my lot, day and night. And I shall never find peace."

"In the fold of the Church is always peace," was Ursula's only answer.

On another day, Folly, in the wild garden, met Sister Monica, who always let herself in through the small wicket, as she came up from teaching her little school in the town below. And there was upon her face a

## Folly

weary look that made Folly ask impulsively: "Are you happy, Sister?"

Monica glanced at her, and the lines in her face were smoothed away as she laughed: "What a foolish question!"

"But I want to know."

"I can't tell you then. I'm too busy to think about it."

"But why did you look so tired as you came in at the gate just now?"

"Oh, that was because I had to punish a boy for stealing a pencil; and I'm afraid he'll end in prison one day, for he's done similar things before."

"And you were sad for him? Are you only sad for other people?"

"It would be a stupid thing to be sad for one's self, would it not?" asked Monica, in her practical way.

"I don't know. Most people are. But tell me—do you like teaching the children?"

"Not particularly. What does that matter? When I gave myself to the Church, I surrendered my likes and dislikes, of course."

"Of course," echoed Folly, and waving farewell, turned down one of the overgrown side-paths. "She has no self left—swallowed up in the whole; but she does useful work. Is that the way, I wonder?"

She had been with the Sisters several weeks as guest and lodger, when she came into the little formal garden on a morning, and found the nuns sewing, while one read



## Folly

aloud; and a little apart from them, where the murmur of the voice was pleasant and not disturbing, Mother Miguel herself, and with her the old priest whom Folly had seen very often since the day of the pilgrimage.

Mother Miguel beckoned her to come and sit on the other side of the bench; and the old man greeted her in a fatherly manner, as if they had been long acquainted.

"You are happy here, my child?" he began, somewhat abruptly.

"Happy?" she repeated wistfully. "I am trying to learn how to live."

"And what have you learned?" he asked keenly.

"That peace is not to be had for the asking, nor light by prayer."

He answered in a strange figure: "Peace is the rare blossom that crowns the thorny cactus; but if the plant spread out its leaves to the light and air of heaven, the flower will surely come."

"Thorns—thorns," she sighed.

He studied her sharply some moments, then put a direct question: "The *señor* who came here with you one day—is he better?"

"He has gone away," she answered.

"Ah, so they tell me," he continued genially. "In a little town there is much talk. And will not come back?"

"And will not come back."

## Folly

“And the *señora*—she would like to continue here with the Sisters?”

“I cannot tell. No—here is no peace for me.”

“The *señora* is not of the Church,” he murmured gently.

“No, but I have lived among the Sisters. They have seen me through the darkest places. They have done for me all that they can. But I am different. Perhaps I shall find light elsewhere.”

“Surely, surely,” said Mother Miguel, in her deep comforting voice, “we none of us live in darkness all our days. The seeker shall find.”

And the priest: “A physician cannot prescribe without knowing the nature of the disease.”

“Why, it is simple enough,” said Folly. “I have lost hope and faith and——”

“Ah”—he smiled so genially that she could not take offence—“out of the fold, you see, out of the fold.”

She smiled back at him with more interest than she had previously shown: “That cannot be, for I do not admit that I am a sheep at all.”

“Ah—ah,” he shook his head laughing over her confession. “It is a pity, but if it cannot be helped—? When salvation is given freely—but you would work out your own? Well, well . . .”

He rose and stood with his hands clasped over his belt, looking down upon the Mother Superior.

“I think it is time,” said he; and the words did not seem to refer to anything that preceded or followed.

## Folly

Then he blest them all and said farewell and went his way.

When Folly would have returned to her garden, Mother Miguel still held her hand a moment. "Dear child, dear child, you do not belong among my children; but you will find your place."

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### HELP.

ON a fair evening, perhaps a week later, Folly sat alone on the lichen-covered wall at the foot of the garden. She looked down the shaggy slope across the broad valley, dotted with cypresses and poplar-enclosed farm-steadings, to the golden city on its dome-like hill; and beyond, at the river delta reflecting every rose-tipped cirrus in the pale sky; and farther beyond, at the black and jagged mountain-ridge above which streamed the trailing yellow lights of the vanished sun. But she was staring beyond and farther still, and watching with inner vision the sunset as it might appear from a ship westward bound across the violet sea. . . .

There came into her consciousness the sound of slow footsteps on the rough path. She did not turn as she wondered idly whether this was Sister Teresa ready to chide her; or Monica, to make her laugh; or Ursula, to torment her with the presence of a sainthood to which she might never attain.

But the voice that said, "Good-evening to you, Folly," from the depths of the brier-grown arbour, belonged to

## Folly

none of these; and brought the dreamer to her feet in a maze.

“Materkin! How ever did you get here?”

“In the usual way,” was the composed answer. “You look as if you suspected a magic carpet up my sleeve.” The little old lady blossomed into dimples as she came forward, looking as much at home as in her own garden.

“What have you come for?” asked Folly, pressing back into the hedge.

But Mrs. Christie advanced still further, and caught her. “You, my girl. It’s time to be coming home.”

“Home—where?”

“Well, to England, speaking generally. To a work-house, asylum or orphanage, if no other place is open to you.”

But Folly was bent on her own train of thought.

“Who brought you here?”

“Guess now. Myself? Susan? Nobody? That silly Andrew had me swathed inches-deep in cotton wool, and handled me like a box of loose eggs, when I wanted to be gadding about and seeing things. Fancy, at his age, treating a poor old mother so!”

“Did he send you?”

“Not he.”

“Bring you then?”

“My dear child, he came back and fetched me—by slow stages—like a royal progress.”

## Folly

"Came back? Where from?"

"To the best of my belief, from Espinal itself."

"O poor Andrew—here? And I never dreamed that he would stay . . ."

"What possible difference could it have made to you?" the old lady asked shrewdly.

"Oh, none of course; but I am a—there's no word bad enough for me. And I've been trying to learn, too; but the lesson is hard. I didn't want to be a burden to anybody; and I'm out of the way here, and the Sisters are kind. . . ."

"You can't help being a burden to somebody, so you must get even by letting somebody else be a burden to you."

She saw that she had pricked more deeply than she intended, and hastened to add:

"So come home with me, and let us be a burden to each other."

"I can't think of it"—began Folly.

"Oh, well, then, I must wait, and explore the country, until you can begin to think of it. Bless you, child, I haven't had such an outing for years!"

"It's no good—your waiting," protested Folly.

"Why not? I've nothing better to do. Susan is with me, and I'm sure the Sisters will make us very comfortable. In ten years or twenty, you may be ready to change your mind."

"It's ridiculous!" said Folly.

"What—your changing your mind?"

## Folly

"No, I mean, to be besieged by you—and—and Andrew in this way."

"Nonsense, it makes a change in our humdrum lives, and if you find us a bore, we shall just have to lie low. . . ."

"You see, you don't know the whole story," urged Folly. "If you did . . ."

"Fiddlesticks! I've heard all I want to know from Andrew. I'll wait for the rest until you're a trifle more cheerful."

"Cheerful—O mater!"

"Well, my dear, you surely do look forward to being rather more cheerful some day, don't you? I thought I was being cautious. Mind you, I said only 'a trifle.'"

But at Folly's look, the transparent jewelled hands went out and drew her close. "I know. The present is everything. I know. I know."

After a time, Folly lifted her head saying earnestly: "It isn't a question of *doing* right, mater; if I could only make myself *be* right. . . .But there's another *me* in me . . ."

"Now that's philosophy," said the old lady briskly, "and we must get away from it as fast as we can. Oh, I know all about the *Me* and the *Not-Me*, the *Ego* and the *Non-Ego*, and the rest of the rubbish. And a lot of suicides they are responsible for, too." She lifted her glass to study a bit of red lichen on the wall. "Look here, now, I'll tell you what you're trying to do; you're trying to stand outside yourself and study your own

## Folly

anatomy. Suppose you had been a beetle—you might well have been a beetle but for some trifling accident. Should you try to stand on your shell and see how you were made? It's in the nature of the case that no beetle can talk like a Huxley about his own organs. Sensible beetles study only their neighbour ants and grasshoppers, and the flies that they catch for dinner—do you see my parable?"

"What flies shall I catch for my dinner?" asked Folly wistfully.

"Come to Westmouth and we shall see."

But Folly was looking again at the black mountain that hides the western ocean; and her thoughts were with the ship that had sailed beyond her reach forever.

"You think I don't know how it hurts? Why, girl, I lost Andrew's father. And I was young then; and for a time all my faith in life was torn to rags. But I had to set to work a-mending it; and in time, oh yes, in time, I found that I had a more beautiful thing than before. And since we are talking in parables: charity, now, that's a whole stuff, the robe of the spirit, always strong, always fresh, lasting a life-time; and hope is like a tapestry never-ended, into which we weave our daily dreams; but faith, that's a frail heirloom, always tearing, always mended; but where we stitch at it, often with tears, we find that not merely have we made it good, but we have embroidered it over with the treasures of our own lives, so that in the end it is a sacrificial garment. . . . Why must I always



## Folly

be talking nonsense? The air is rather chilly. Shall we go in?"

"Will you take my arm?" said Folly.

Mrs. Christie laid her lace-mittened hand upon it, patting it softly now and again, as they paced along by the wall; and presently the old lady pointed to the little town whence lights were beginning to leap out among the blue shadows. "Espinal," she said. "It is time to leave it now."

"You know what it means, mater? I'm afraid I must carry its thorns with me wherever I go."

"No, leave it all—leave it," was the emphatic answer. "I tell you, you can."

Folly smiled her unbelief.

As they turned into the forecourt, among the olean ders, Mrs. Christie said further:

"When you come to me, you need not fear being troubled by Andrew. He will take us home, that's all. You won't mind that?"

"But I can't be the means of parting you."

"Parting us? He can climb the garden-wall by night, and I'll meet him Juliet-fashion, weather permitting."

"But you are his mother!"

"Yours too; and you need me most—just now."

"But people would say . . ."

"A fig! We can stop them—or cut them."

"But I should be so good-for-nothing—such a drag . . ."

## Folly

“My shoulders are strong”—she laughed. “You said that before, but I don’t believe you there, you know. You are warped. . . .”

“Ah, yes.”

“And we want to bend you straight again.”

Hereupon Susan met them; and then followed greetings and explanations and dinner; and Folly had ample time to ponder, as perhaps it was intended that she should ponder.

At all events, Mrs. Christie presently managed it that they two should be alone, each by a window looking out upon the star-lit sky and twinkling lights of the valley.

But Folly was slow to speak.

“Well?” said Mrs. Christie at last.

“I can’t stay here, you see.”

“I know.” She smiled to herself, thinking that the priest was a wise man, and that when he and her Andrew had put their heads together, they were bound to be right, as in this case.

“I love the Sisters, but their way is not mine. They have renounced this life; I must go on seeking till I find—the way to live it.”

“You will find it,” was the soft answer. “And you will come home with me?”

“Wait till you hear the whole story; I can tell it now.”

She told it without flinching, without sparing herself, or reserving the shadow of an excuse; and when she had done, she asked:

## Folly

“Can you not see?”

“Better than you think—much better, child. And I say again, the only way is to come home with me. Tear out the thorns, and set to work a-mending. It’s the only decent thing to do.”

One long moment Folly hesitated; then she threw herself into the loving arms held out to her. “Teach me your way, mother!”



BOOK III.  
THE FOOTPATH-WAY.

“They that have the true gift of love eschew the clamorous highroads where men jostle one another as they press forward to the City of Triumph ; and seek rather the foot-paths of humble service, and enter the more speedily into the dwelling of Peace.”

J. HALDANE GORE, *Commonplace-Book.*  
(*Unpublished.*)

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### WISDOM AT CHELSEA.

GREGORY drove to Chelsea one afternoon in June with trouble in his heart; and, knowing by long experience where Mrs. Patrick was likely to be, tapped at the door of her studio.

It was a discouraged "Come in!" that greeted him.

"I knew it was you"—she stretched out a listless hand from a low chair, whence she was contemplating a large canvas. "Nobody else has such a genius for coming at inopportune times."

Her Liberty pinafore was spotless, as were her fingers, and her hair was not in artistic disarray,—facts which a shrewd casual observer might have interpreted as possibly connected with the inopportune visit.

"It's nearly tea-time," he strove to excuse himself. "What's the matter?"

She pointed to the picture, with an expression of pouting disgust.

He looked, but was none the wiser. "Well?"

"I did it."

"Did you? It's very nice."

"Go on blackening your soul"—she relaxed a little,

## Folly

and twinkled at him. "Can you honestly say you like it?"

"I don't know much about such things," he fenced. "I never bought a picture in my life."

"Shame—to confess it! But tell me what you think of it—not perjury, honest criticism."

"Isn't it rather—er, large?"

"Go on"—she was non-committal.

"Look here, I refuse to be bullied into making a fool of myself. Let's talk about something else, or I'll catechise you on bacteria."

She submitted gracefully. "You needn't go on then. But I'll tell you the fact: it's a plain failure, and so am I."

"In what way?" he inquired, with due respect.

"It lacks soul, and so do I."

He pretended to reach for his prescription-book. "Two grains of—eh? Soul is the power of the smooth-running machine, and when the machine gets out of gear . . ."

"But it isn't; my body is most unsympathetically healthy."

"A sick soul in a plump little frame"—he teased her.

"Unkind! I can't help being plump and little"—

"But why on earth should you want to be otherwise?"

She ignored the compliment. "The real difficulty isn't that my soul is sick. I haven't got one; I must have been born without it."



## Folly

"Perhaps it never grew up with the rest of you," he said, "but it must be rattling about somewhere. We'll find it one day—or I'm not a surgeon. But all this non-sensical talk is a new phase. What has gone wrong? Who has been abusing you?"

"A critic. He said I was a clever woman but lacked soul."

"By Jove, that's the new book! And I promised to read it. How long has it been out?" He looked conscience-stricken.

"Nearly a fortnight. And quite naturally you forgot all about it. No, don't waste time over it. You'll be better off with your bacteria."

"I've been a good deal worried lately," he continued in self-defence.

Her manner changed at once. "Anything special?"

"Go on. Tell me all your troubles first. I'll wait my turn."

"They sound very foolish and petty when I come to speak of them; but, you see, I've been hearing a few plain truths about myself, and I never did have any philosophy . . ."

"Luckily," he interposed.

"And it isn't a pleasing picture."

"What else did the objectionable man—I gather it was a man—say?"

"He was polite. He said I had a pretty feminine touch."

"Well, what harm does that do?"

## Folly

"It smashes me."

"You don't look smashed.

"Professionally, I mean."

"Oh—professionally"—he lost interest at once.

"Now, however much I try, I can never be anything more than a minnow swimming about the surface of a pond . . ."

"When you want to be a whale burrowing in the depths of the ocean—is that it?"

"Well, my friends always told me I had talent"—

If she expected a compliment, she was disappointed. "If I had to choose between the two, I greatly prefer the minnow—for daily life," said he. "But where does the picture come in?"

"Ah, that's the point. Now that the scales are off my eyes, I can see that it's clever, too, and feminine and pretty."

"And so——?"

"And so"—she sighed heavily—"I shall give up both and live on my income."

"Bravo!" said he; and his unusually sober face, at which she had already cast various sidelong glances, was lighted for a moment by a gleam of genuine pleasure.

She looked at him dubiously. "I'm not fated, it seems, to be a professional woman."

"Thank heaven for that"—the look of pleasure lingered—"as I do. She's a curious amphibian, still the professional woman. Personally, I've no use for her."

She leaned towards him a little, dimpling as she whis-

## Folly

pered. "Nor have I. But it's heresy to say so now-a-days. I didn't want to go in for anything; but they all told me I'd got talent, and it was such a pity to waste it."

His face had grown sober again. He asked absently: "What did you want to go in for?"

Mabel looked at him sideways, her hands clasped in her lap. Now was her opportunity. He had been uncommonly slow, and had required much delicate leading; but at last they had reached the point. So looking, she saw the genuine trouble in his face, no longer disguised; and forgetting all about herself, and her hopes and fears, she exclaimed: "Oh, what is the matter? Can't I help?"

"I came to you for help," he answered simply. "I had a letter this morning from Haldane Gore——"

"Oh!"—her hand went out to him. "But I thought——"

"Yes, he is dead. It was forwarded to me by our consul——"

Mrs. Patrick's little fingers were most sympathetic.

"In New York."

"In New York?"

"Yes. He died there—at Castle Garden."

"Castle Garden—what's that?"

"It's a place where they land emigrants, I believe."

"Oh!"—her other hand stole out and was likewise seized. "But what was he doing there?"

"I'll tell you all about it some day; it's a strange

## Folly

story. I can't—just yet. But there's a practical matter on which I must have your advice. The consul enclosed another letter. . . .”

“Well?”

“For Mrs. Christie.”

“Folly—yes.”

“I suppose he did not know how to reach her.”

“I suppose not.”

Mabel's bright eyes were full of consideration, and she seemed to have forgotten where her hands were. “You can't send it by post. You might take it yourself, or I might, or we might leave it to materkin; but I think there's a better way.”

“Well?”

“Give it to Andrew.”

“Exactly. I wondered if you would say that.”

“And leave it entirely in his hands.”

“Yes.”

“He would be perfectly fair, and you could trust him absolutely.”

“Just so.”

“You see”—she grew more eager over her theme—“it's for his sake as well as hers; it puts on him the responsibility of deciding and of acting.”

“What is he doing now?”

“Oh, I don't know. Poor Andrew! Roving, I believe, and loafing. He's in town for a few days—came to see me yesterday.”

“Where is she?”

## Folly

“Still at Westmouth, I believe. I haven’t had a word from her since they came back; but dear old materkin sends me a line in her own hand now and again. Folly has all Haldane’s papers, you know. I believe she lives among them night and day. I know materkin is distressed, though she tries to make light of it.”

“It’s very bad for all of them. Do you think they will ever get out of the tangle?”

Mabel shook her head. “Who can say?” Then she suddenly remembered her hands, blushed and tried in vain to withdraw them; and to cover her confusion, added hastily: “That’s why I want to throw in my mite of help, you see. It would give them a chance to make it up—I mean, the letter would. Poor Haldane! Do you know, I sometimes fancy, quite by myself—I mean without any hint or suggestion from anybody—that he would have been glad to have them brought together.”

“Why do you think so?” he asked, still keeping her prisoner.

“It’s difficult to explain.”

“Please try.”

“I can’t unless you let me go.”

He released her then, but held her as much by his look.

“I suppose they call it psychology, those that understand it; but to me it’s only the result of observation. I have noticed that there are some people in the world

## Folly

who have—well, what is commonly called temperament. It must be a fearful curse, you know. They seem to be nearly always the victims of delusions; they can't live by facts alone, and they're always finding their delusions stuffed with sawdust or air or something equally not nourishing; so between the two they starve. I think I'd better stick to that one case. I suppose to them their love was like an old romance—'Tristan and Isolde,' you know. But—am I all wrong, or isn't that kind of thing bound to end in a tragedy? Even when King Mark is a good man and keeps out of the way, it doesn't do for daily life, does it? Suppose he hadn't been ill, would she have gone in the end, do you think? Does that sort of—of—attraction, shall I call it?—I mean, is it really irresistible?"

He shook his head slightly, but decidedly.

"Because if it is, this world is only a series of pitfalls. And I don't think it is—for most of us, anyway. Now I tell you frankly: if I had been in her place, I should never have gone. Perhaps I lack imagination. I should just have fretted and cried, I suppose, until I had worn out the worst of my trouble, and then I should have gone on living in the usual way. It's what most of us do."

"And if I had been in his place?" he asked.

"You would never have broken down as he did."

"But it was disease that conquered him," was Gregory's defence of his friend.

## Folly

"Well, they have paid—poor things! But I am very slow in coming to my point. Knowing what I know and what you have told me, I don't see at all why there isn't room still in her life and Andrew's for the common everyday love, which is the only kind that most of us come to know."

"It may be," he conceded, "if they could be made to see it. But I have got what I came for; you confirm my judgment on every point."

"Which was all you wanted," said she. "Suppose I had disagreed with you on every point?"

"You wouldn't have done that—in a vital matter," he insisted.

"How do you know?"

"Because you are what you are"—he hesitated.

She, reading in his eyes the approach of that which she had previously diverted, said hastily: "Anyway, whenever my opinion is worth anything to you, I shall be glad to give it."

"Always?" he asked.

She nodded and smiled at him, without a trace of coquetry.

"Do you understand what I mean?" he asked further.

"I think so," she said, "but we must not talk any more about it now."

So they had their brief moment of happiness in the shadow of grief—a moment cut short by Mabel, who sent Gregory away to fulfil his trust.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### A DELICATE MISSION.

GREGORY was fortunate in having no long search for Christie; after telephoning once or twice, he found him by accident in the smoking-room of their club. They had had a slight acquaintance for some years; but no chance had ever brought them into friendship. And on this day, as Gregory was driving down Piccadilly, he happened to see his man by the window, half hidden behind an illustrated paper.

Gregory went in and began to fumble among the journals and magazines on the table at which Christie sat; but did not succeed in attracting the latter's attention until he asked, awkwardly enough, with the sheet still between them, "Any news?"

Then Christie put down his paper and nodded and said: "Not much."

"What have you got there? Oh, *Up-to-Date*—that's a stupid production, isn't it? I never see it." Christie was not responsive, and Gregory found his position increasingly difficult, as he continued: "By the way, I have an errand—a commission—I scarcely know what to call it—to you. My friend, Haldane Gore——"



## Folly

Christie lifted his paper slightly from the table and dropped it again. "I've just been reading about it."

"What? Already? There?" groaned Gregory, reaching for the sheet.

"Yes—with full details and illustrations," answered Christie.

"They have been quick," said Gregory painfully. "These correspondents—can't they let a man die in peace? I got the cable only last week."

"They make out that he was a famous man," said Christie, with reserve.

"Now that he is dead. How he would have hated all this!"

"Did you come here to discuss him with me?" asked Christie brusquely.

"Well—yes, in a way. At least, among his papers was found a letter to Mrs. Christie. Everything was sent on to me; and I was asked to forward——"

"Well"—Christie shrugged—"do you want her address? Is that it?"

"No, that I happen to know from her friend, Mrs. Patrick."

"Then why do you come to me?" demanded Christie somewhat roughly.

"Why, don't you see, man, I can't send such a letter on by post?"

Christie looked at him hard for a moment, then grew abstracted. "That reminds me." He then perceived that Gregory was waiting, and added: "I'm

## Folly

sorry. I was remembering that *Up-to-Date* goes down to Westmouth every day; and unless the mater happens to be the one who opens it . . . I'd better telegraph, I think. What were you saying? Oh, by post? Well, get a messenger then. How does it concern me?"

"I thought you might wish to be the messenger," said Gregory, finding his opportunity.

"What do you mean?" Christie's face went redder.

"Only that it seems best to me to put the letter into your hands."

After a pause, Christie said: "If you are acting as Gore's friend, I must confess that your procedure seems to me a little unusual."

"I know my man," said Gregory; and then: "May I venture to say both men?"

Christie shrugged and pared away the edges of the newspaper before him. "What do you expect me to do?"

"I? Nothing, naturally. That is your affair."

"You wash your hands of the responsibility? And you have no fear of betraying—your friend?"

"None whatever."

"Huh!" said Christie, and slashed viciously at the paper. And after a while: "A letter is a letter, and there's an end of it; I'll take it, if you like. I was thinking of going down soon, anyway. I haven't seen my mother since we came home from abroad. I can just as well make it to-day."

## Folly

There was apparently nothing more to be said; but Gregory still lingered, pulling at his beard, and Christie made no move to go.

"I suppose," said the latter, after a time, "that I may talk to you more freely from the fact that you were—so to speak—professionally mixed up in the case. Not that there is anything much to say."

"I suspended judgment myself long ago—couldn't get any satisfactory diagnosis, you see. No doubt there may be cases now and then in which you have all the conditions for an electric battery; given the poles and communication, you're bound to have the current. Oh, I talked differently on the spot; but there's something to be said for their side as well. Still, I prefer to withhold my opinion."

"I don't know. You seem to be exonerating two of the actors, and omitting the third," said Christie.

"I'm neither exonerating nor condemning. I don't know enough yet to do either."

"Yet? You expect to know more, some day?"

"A thousand years hence—who can tell? There's no reason why we shouldn't know something about souls, when we have found out all that is to be learned about bodies. At present, we are only beginning to understand the rudiments of physiology—the other is a long way off. But I don't despair."

"Ah, yes, you have been trying to find the cure for cancer, haven't you?" asked Christie, perhaps not aware of the depth of his stab.

## Folly

Gregory winced. "I am trying. I shall go on, even though I failed to save the life of my friend."

Christie looked up with compunction. "What I should have said is, that if diagnosis seems to you impossible, how about treatment?"

"I tried interference," said Gregory. "I argued the matter from my point of view, which is more or less that generally held. But is the majority always right? I only hope I did no harm."

"My own policy is always non-interference," said Christie. "Beyond that I cannot go."

"To me that seems only reasonable," said Gregory, "but . . ."

"But if the world were ruled by reason—you were about to say?" Christie took him up.

"Something like that."

"I suppose one forgets to be reasonable with the unreasonable, just as one finds it hard to be tolerant with the intolerant."

"There's another thing," pursued Gregory. "To return to the medical analogy for a moment, after all, it's the patient who cures himself. Only we must clear the way—give working-room, so to speak. I mean, after we have eliminated the obstacles, as much as possible we should bring it about, as far as we can, that the faculties have free play, and avoid stagnation—look to it that they do play."

"I see your point," said Christie, still intent upon the destruction of his paper. "You have given me some-

## Folly

thing to think about. In this case, the chief obstacle was, of course . . .”

It seemed as if Gregory shrank from using the name in this connection. He said only: “At least, it is removed; and you have a free hand.”

“I am not so sure of that.” Christie looked up abruptly. “I incline to think that it has existed all along chiefly in the mind of—of the patient; and that consequently it may grow exaggerated by this—disaster”—he indicated the paper before him. “Is time always a healer?”

“Pretty well, pretty well,” answered Gregory. “But we always want things done in such a hurry.”

“You may not know, perhaps,” said Christie, “that when I was in Biarritz, Gore wired for me to come over to Espinal.”

“I suspected something of the sort,” answered Gregory. “I see the whole thing now: how he got away and how you came to bring her back.”

“I tell you this,” continued Christie, in the tone of one who has a hard lesson to say, but must get it out somehow, “because, as his friend, you may care to know that there was no ill feeling between us when we parted.”

“Some day you will be glad to remember that,” were Gregory’s only words, but his face was more eloquent.

Christie looked at his watch. “Have you that letter with you? I see I have just time for the express. I may as well get the business over.”

## Folly

He smiled rather grimly as he took the envelope. "It would be temptingly easy to destroy it."

"But how would that help your case?" demanded Gregory.

"My good fellow,"—Christie was vehement—"would any medicine on earth help my case? Months ago I gave it up as hopeless." He rose to go.

"There you're out," insisted Gregory; and wondered helplessly what he should say next. "At least," he added lamely, "I am convinced that your future lies in your own hands."

Thereupon the other man gave a short laugh and turned away.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### DIPLOMACY.

SHORTLY before tea, that same afternoon, Mrs. Christie knocked at Folly's door to say: "I hope you won't mind, dear. I've just had a telegram from Andrew to say that he's coming down by the express."

"I shall go out," was Folly's swift thought, as she put her arms about a mass of papers lying on the table before her.

She did not divine the old lady's diplomacy in suggesting: "You might go somewhere, you know, if you'd rather not see him. Would you like another sail now? There's not a breath of wind, so I won't be anxious about you, as I was last time."

Then Folly said, as she was expected to say: "I don't see why I should. We shall have to meet sometimes, I suppose."

"Well, well, as you please." Mrs. Christie went away chuckling.

It pleased Folly to dress more carefully than usual. She had a dim feeling that she did not want to stir Andrew's pity or contempt, or to give him an opportunity to label her frowsy, as she had often heard him sum up

## Folly

other women. Besides, it had been a reproach of her young days that she dressed badly.

When she had done, she looked at herself in the glass, very pale in her black lawn with its narrow hem-stitched collar and cuffs of white linen. She wondered that she had not noticed before her haggard face and harsh, colourless hair; and with a sudden, quite surprising desire to add a little grace went out into the garden for a bunch of purple lilac.

Christie arrived just as they were beginning tea, which Folly was pouring. She hastily set down the teapot, and without looking up, gave him her hand. He greeted her courteously, as frank and unembarrassed, it seemed to her, as any ordinary visitor. And when she had made his cup to his liking, he took it away at once and sat down at his mother's little table, apparently telling her some joke or funny story, as she judged from the way that they laughed together.

Neither of them paid any attention to Folly, who, though feeling very much out in the cold, could not make up her mind to join them, and so solaced her tea with a novel that she picked up from the table.

They gossiped and squabbled together in a way that she remembered from the very early days of her courtship. Nor did she have a word or look from either of them until Andrew brought his mother's cup to be filled.

"Are you pretty well?" he asked then, watching her.

"Yes, thank you," she answered curtly.



## Folly

"I'm glad of that"—but his calm tone, sincere as it was, angered her.

As soon as she could do so with grace, she left mother and son together, protesting that the novel she had picked up was so absorbing that she could not put it down.

Immediately he dropped his bantering tone: "You got my telegram, of course?"

"Yes, it was a mercy. I had the newspapers in my own room when she came asking for them. I suppose she expects every day—to hear something of the sort."

"You know then?"

"I read some of the accounts—there were several."

"Yes. I bought other papers on the train. I suppose she'll have to see them afterwards—but somehow, mater, I don't fancy the task of breaking the news."

"It requires tact," she said, and tried to cheer him up: "You're my son, you know."

"Yes, and strongly inclined to hide behind your apron, too."

"Fie, fie," she admonished him. "Shame upon you! No son of mine ever hides behind any apron. You'll do it properly, or I shall disown you!"

"More than that, I've got a letter to deliver, sent to Gregory."

"I see. And he, being a sensible man, brought it to you. He couldn't have done better."

"But consider my position, mater."

## Folly

"Nonsense, you don't need any consideration, she insisted.

"She isn't well, is she?"

"Now that is hard to say. She's as mute as perverse Kate. I think the edge is wearing off a little—at least, it is bound to in time. But as long as there is any room for doubt, she'll make herself miserable. She's pretty strong, you know, only I don't like her mooning over those papers upstairs. I sometimes wonder whether it isn't my duty to go and burn them. But she's better—I'm sure of that; she's quieting down."

"And now I've got to stir it up all again," he groaned.

"Sometimes stirring settles things—coffee, for instance. How do you think she looks?"

"Frowsy," was the brief reply.

"Poor Folly! And yet I thought she was smarter than usual to-day, with a spray of blossoms in her belt. I've done my best to interest her in the outside world and people. The only thing she will do is go out sailing occasionally."

Seeing that his forehead creased, she added hastily: "Oh, I don't let her go alone. She wanted to, of course, and pleaded that you had once said she managed a boat as well as a man; but I wouldn't give in. I said I should have hysteria all the time she was out, and should make daily preparations for her coming home drowned; and the picture was too much for her. She consented to take a fisherman; and I selected my man

## Folly

with care. I have known the family for generations back—never lost a passenger—and all that sort of thing . . .”

“Right, materkin,” said he, when she paused for breath. And after a moment he seized both her hands, asking abruptly: “Do you think I shall ever have any show again?”

Her eyes were not altogether free from tears as she answered: “Isn’t it rather odd, boy, that you still want a show?”

“Perhaps, but I do,” he answered doggedly.

“Sure?”

“Sure.”

“If you had the proper pride of the British husband, you would have trumped up a divorce-case long ago.”

“Possibly, but it would have taken some lying. And what of her, then?”

“Yes, what of her? People ought to know by this time. But you never were quite orthodox, son.”

“No,” he admitted. “I tried to be. I have spent hours cursing her—cursing them.”

“And it’s no good?”

“Not a bit. I’m mortal sorry for the lot of us—that’s all.”

“One is past sorrow,” she suggested softly.

“Yes. I haven’t got used to remembering that yet. . . . The point of the whole miserable business is, that I can neither cast her off entirely, nor settle down to a reasonable life while I am in this state of suspense. I

## Folly

tell you, mater, what made me realise their point of view more than anything else: it was trying to get up a decent hatred, and finding out that I'd apparently got to go on loving her—perhaps to the end of my days."

"Yes," she said, "probably. That's in our blood, I believe. . . . But only this morning I was reading something that touches your case. Listen now." She held him by one button, while she reached for a thin little volume on the table by her side.

She found the place marked and read aloud in her pretty quavering voice:

"Now judge ye!—For a girl I walked forlorn  
Who laughed my vows to scorn;  
She loved another, who in coin repaid  
Wooing a second maid.

And she, this second, making all complete,  
Would worship at my feet.—  
Four pretty fools and Kâma with his malice  
Thus drove me from my palace.'

What say you to that?"

"We were only three fools; we lacked the second woman."

"You miss the point altogether," she retorted, with asperity. "Are you going to let Kâma drive you from your palace?"

"I'm wondering how to tell her," he said absently,

## Folly

“Come, come,” she took him to task. “You are not often discourteous to your mother. I was reading you poetry!”

He smiled at her. “Do you think I am in the mood for verses, mater? What are you up to? I suppose you have a point in mind?”

“I hope so, I am sure,” she answered, with dignity. “I try to have, as a rule. I asked you if you were going to let love drive you from your palace—that’s your birthright as my son. I want you to live in your palace, and to build your share, as your forefathers did before you. . . .” Her voice faltered, but she laughed away the tears. “I don’t want you to be a broken-down old ruin with ivy crawling over you, and toads in the dark corners. Remember, you’re a wing, or a wall, or a corner, in a great building; and if you let her spoil your life . . .”

“By the Lord, no!” he answered, with sudden vigour. “Don’t worry, mater. We shall find some way out presently.”

The book was shaking in her hand. He took it gently from her, and wiped away her tears with his own handkerchief.

Presently she dimpled again. “The foolish old woman!” she chirruped.

“Not altogether; you have your good points, mater,” he encouraged her. “Now what’s next?”

“I haven’t made the full application of the text even

## Folly

yet. It sticks in my mind, somehow, that you're still hoping to make it up . . ."

"Well?"

"Don't. It's no good. Let her go. Learn to live without her."

"By Jove," said he, "that's queer advice!"

"You'll never get any other from me," she retorted. "And you'll never get her back any other way."

"Wait," she continued, as he stared at her. "Let that old Hindoo tell you again:

'Harder than faces in a glass designed,  
A woman's heart to bind;  
Like mountain-paths up cragged heights that twist,  
Her ways are lightly missed.'

Now Folly is a woman."

"And so are you," he said.

"Unfortunately," she responded. "So you miss my ways too, do you? Yet a mother's course ought to be plain-sailing surely."

"Not perhaps to the craft that she's trying to steer. Tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it—if I can."

"But when it comes to the point of giving up Folly—there you draw the line—eh?"

"Why should it come to a question of that?"—he looked troubled.

"Why—oh, why! You great clumsy man-of-war, I'm only trying to manœuvre you into a promising position for the conflict!"

## Folly

"I see," he said at last. "I'm to pretend not to want her . . ."

"Hush!" she interrupted him. "Pretend nothing. You couldn't do it if you tried. No, no, never mind my riddles; I'm only sporting my wits. But I've another verse for you somewhere. Yes, here:

'Bear not the burthen of a world outworn,  
Nor to the future bow;  
With every hour thy joy be newly born,  
And earth be new-created every morn,—  
Thy life is here and now.'

That's the way you used to live when you had her. Can't you keep it up without her?"

He shook his head.

"Why not? Other people do. I did."

He made no answer, and she continued: "The kind of love that can't do without the beloved, Andrew, is, to my mind, a pretty low thing, and deserves all the contempt it ever gets."

"It's the natural kind," he commented.

"Perhaps, but that fact doesn't alter my description, does it? I should think a Christie might rise above it."

"Well, mater, well," he said impatiently, "and what's the good of it all?"

She answered him in verse:

"Like as a goldsmith beateth out his gold  
To other fashions fairer than the old,  
So may the Spirit, learning ever more,  
In ever nobler forms his life infold.'"

## Folly

"I never thought you poetically inclined," he scoffed; but she knew that he was touched.

"Folly and I have been reading this together," she answered. "Here's one we had a dispute about:

'Wayfarers on the dusty road  
By shaded wells their heavy load  
Undoing rest awhile, and then  
Pass on restored.—What cause of tears, O men?'

She wanted to know who imposed the heavy loads on the wayfarers; and I said that if they didn't have anything to carry, they would never appreciate 'undoing' them by the 'shaded wells.'"

"And she said there were no 'shaded wells,' I suppose?"

"No, she answered me with another—this:

'Rest in the World's still heart; thy little cares  
Like wind-rocked billows roll,  
And all thy pleasure as the light wind fares;—  
Now give thee peace, my soul!'

And she said: 'If only I could find the path there!' You must be patient with the girl, Andrew. She is honestly doing her best, I believe."

"That reminds me, I'd better be looking her up and get it over. I want to go back to town to-night."

"No, no," she urged. "Be reasonable."

"Reasonable?"—he laughed, then seeing her distressed face, added quickly: "After all this philosophy, I ought to be. But what is unreasonable in wishing to get an unpleasant thing done as soon as possible?"



## Folly

“I want you to do me a favour, boy; I want you to wait until morning—and to think over what we have said.”

“Well, well,” he assented, with a touch of irritation, ending with: “Lend me that book, will you?”

Then she smiled, knowing that she need not fear for him; and when she was alone, chid herself sharply that she had ever feared.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### BY THE SEA.

WHEN Christie came down to breakfast in the morning he was told that Folly had gone out; and as his mother rarely appeared until nearly luncheon time, he was rather glad of the respite, and strolled away for a quiet time by the sea.

He followed the broad avenue of elms down the hill, and came out by the rocks at the end of the Promenade; and here he idled until, chancing to look up, he saw her—his wife—slowly climbing a lane that ended, as he knew, in a path cut out of the face of the cliffs.

With a heavy heart, he felt that he must seize the occasion, and followed her between the ivy-covered walls, trying over in his mind fifty ways of introducing his errand.

He did not come up with her—perhaps loitering intentionally—until she was near the end of the path. Here it is protected only by a low crumbling wall that overhangs the sea where the tide dwells in a perpetual surge among the boulders.

She turned at the sound of footsteps, and showed no

## Folly

surprise upon seeing him; it was almost as if she had expected him.

He made some blundering remark about the bay.

“Yes,” she agreed, “it reminds me a little—only a very little—of Espinal. I come here often.”

Certainly she was not making his task easier.

She followed this up with a blunt: “I suppose you had some special reason for coming down to see me?”

“You suppose correctly,” he answered, looking away from her across the sea.

“And you don’t know how to begin?” Thus, after a time, she tried to help him.

“I happened to see Gregory the other day——”

She turned paler, but waited in silence.

“He asked me to—in short, I have a message—a letter—to hand over to you. . . .”

She sat down on the broken wall, resting her elbow on the stone and her cheek on her hand; so watched the tide sucking in and out among the stones. “I know,” she said, without betraying any emotion. “He is dead.”

“But how could you—? I thought I had stopped the——”

“Was it in the papers, then? I didn’t know that. When did it happen?”

He told her a few details, then she interrupted him: “I felt when it happened—I don’t know how. I was here by the sea.”

He found himself wondering sardonically whether she had made due allowance for the difference in time.

## Folly

"It was early, scarcely daybreak, and I could not sleep. I rose as if I had been called, and came here, and watched the red dawn, and the sun come up out of the waves. And I knew he would never see that sun. . . ."

He was relieved that she did not cast before him the burden of her grief; and yet her stillness alarmed him, as it had done before at Espinal. . . . It might be that this was only the first stupor from the blow, and that when she awakened . . .

"The letter?" she asked; and he put it into her hands.

She looked down upon it as it lay in her lap—the envelope bearing the printed address of the British Consulate in New York. She turned it over. It was unsealed.

"It is good of you to give it to me unconditionally," she said, with an effort at gratitude.

He could not help smiling. "Why should I make conditions? It is plainly yours. Gregory made sure of that."

She could not read it until he went away, and he made no move; indeed, on the contrary, he seized her arm as if he feared that she might grow dizzy and lose her balance.

"It is Espinal over again," she said faintly, hoping to remind him to leave her.

"Not quite"—he did not loosen his hold, though she would have liked to draw away. "I must take you

## Folly

home first. I was a fool to come and blurt it out in this place. Steady—now.”

“Oh, I am steady enough,” she said, with a touch of impatience. “And this was the place. It had to happen here. But please go away.”

He shook his head. “It won’t do. There have been fools—and women among them——”

“You may trust me,” she said.

But he was not satisfied. “How do I know that you are not past keeping faith?”

“You cannot—but you might trust me. You trusted me at Espinal—when it was worse.”

He leaned against the face of the rock, immovable. “Was it?” he asked.

“I had that question all out at Biarritz,” she pleaded, “when I could not decide among the difficult ways. Now there’s no choosing—there’s only the one.”

This sounded perilous and he moved nearer.

“No, don’t trouble. If I had intended to end my life in such a mess, do you think I should have waited till now?”

He felt that there was sense in this; still he objected: “There was always hope; you were not sure . . .”

“Sure enough,” said she.

“I will trust you,” he said, upon a sudden impulse. “I will wait for you in the lane.”

“No——”

“You may need help home——”

“I shall not need help.”

## Folly

"Your help," he interpreted this to mean; and walked a few steps away.

But he came back: "If you fail me now, you shatter a life-time of faith . . ."

"A life-time?" she repeated softly. "A life-time?—faith that when you see what is right, you do it—at any cost."

It was a strange thing for him to say, reflecting as it did upon his own hurt; but she remembered that he was his mother's son.

"If you believe that," she answered, "you know that you may trust me now."

"Do you see the right?" he asked keenly.

"If not, at least—at least, I see the wrong."

He turned away a second time; but before she had come into a full sense of her aloneness, she heard his voice again:

"You can't expect it, Folly. Not one man in a hundred would do it. Come back home with me, and I will leave you in peace."

At this, she turned upon him in a sort of dull anger: "I thought you might be the one man. I have trusted your generosity so often; and it has never failed me. I give you my word that I will come home—presently. If you don't go now, I shall think you are afraid of the possible disgrace to your name, your family. . . . Need I say anything more?"

"I think you have said enough," he answered quietly. "I will leave you to your letter."

## Folly

She gazed after him, her eyes wet with sudden compunction, and softly spoke his name.

He looked back, but made no move to return.

“Say that you do trust me.”

He looked at her hard and she met his eyes without flinching.

“I trust you then,” he said. And at last she was alone.

She watched him going until he had turned the bend in the path; and then she looked down at her letter, fearing to touch it. But when a sudden puff of wind lifted a corner of the envelope, she caught it up and held it to her heart, lest it blow away into the sea—unread.

But she would not open it yet a while; she tried first to realize that he who had written the words was absolutely vanished from the face of this earth.

“Dead—dead—dead”—she repeated the word to herself, she knew not how many times; but it bore no meaning whatever.

She watched the home-going of the tawny fishing-fleet. There were days when one trawler came back short-handed, when another failed to come at all; and there were other days when the sand and the rocks were sown with the dead. But what did it mean? Emptiness in the home—in the heart? But this came other ways than by death. Only, while the breath-flame was burning in the beloved, there was always the chance—ah the pitiful clinging to chance. . . . For

## Folly

her, there had long been no hope. They were parted before he left Espinal, before he went to Espinal—parted by the clutch of death upon him before ever she left her husband for his sake. And now what difference could it make that she would surely never see his face again, as she had known it, or touch his hand, or hear his voice—what difference in the world? . . .

And what of him, then, to whom the change had come? To her it was inconceivable, this change, except as a negation, a contradiction of all that he had known and done and been. It was a falling to pieces of the forces of the body and of the soul—to her, at least, silence. . . . But at the last he had spoken, had sent her a message—some comfort, perhaps—a hope . . .

So, with steady fingers, she opened her letter at length. Calm and dry-eyed, sitting on the edge of the cliff, heedless of the glare of the sun above and sea below, she read the last thing that his soul could ever say to hers.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE LETTER.

“AT SEA, May.

“DEAREST AND BEST-BELOVED:

“Has peace come to you yet, or the hope of peace? Should you be glad to know that pain has almost done with me—perhaps quite, when this reaches you? If I could give you peace! It is coming to me as surely—with every breath of the sea-wind; the sense of it is as strong within me as is the sense of spring when the earth is fresh-turned—you know?

“You think I parted easily from you? Not after the letter I left for you at Espinal—you could not think so. We passed through the worst of the bad time then, my poor girl. Why, every nerve of me was crying out to go back, all that interminable night that I sat in the train, and all the next day as we crashed through the desert to the south. And when I came to board the steamer at Gibraltar, I had to fight against the longing to return as the child of sinners fights for his virtue. And you? We must not remember that time; forget it with me. But I had to tell you that it was. Once before I was weak, and you suffered for it, my dear; but

## Folly

I believe the last of my manhood would have died within me, if I had not held out this time. Did you think me a coward? I wanted to spare you the harder part, as I said before; and they that seem to play the coward are not always cowards at heart. I am not trying to excuse myself—and yet, I believe I am. I want you to know that I could not let you be tortured by what I had to bear. Folly, Folly, you understand?”

The woman stopped her reading, and looked out to sea. “You were wrong. It might have been some comfort now to have shared it to the end. But what do I know—O God!”

She read on:

“I struck you hard that the pain might be shorter as it was sharper. And so I forsook you deliberately at Espinal; and there may be bitterness in your heart against me for the only way I could find to do it—”

“No bitterness—no,” she whispered.

“—but, my dear, my dear, Espinal was in truth a city of thorns for you and me; you must look forward to a day when you will forget that.”

“How? How?” was her prayer.

“When I came to Gibraltar, it seemed as if the fates intended to turn me back. The steamer was crowded with homeward-bound travellers from the Mediterranean; and I dared not trust my will to wait until the next. I told you I was going to America? I don't know what put it into my head——”

## Folly

“The story of the woman across the way,” said her heart.

“—but I had always longed for a glimpse of the New World. I know now that it can be no more than that. Somehow, it seemed the thing to do. So when I found there was no room first class or second, I went in the steerage—where there is always room. And as soon as it was done, I knew again that this was the right thing; and so it has proved. It was just a year ago, I think, when I went away from you the second time, that I travelled up to London with a crowd of the poor, and found no brotherhood in them. I have learned better now, alone with them—although these were Spanish folk—with the peace and the leisure of the sea all about us.

“I had my portfolio with me. I don’t know exactly how it escaped burning; and sitting on the lower deck, among my poor neighbours, I read it over and smiled to see how little it takes to make what the world calls a poet. I crumpled the things, one by one, and sent them overboard—a new kind of sea-gull in the wake of the ship: ‘Jaizquibel,’ the ‘Lays of Picardy,’ the ‘Watch-Tower,’ the ‘Loom,’ the ‘City of Thorns’—why should I trouble you with their names? You will remember to destroy all that you have when you are done with them? I have nothing to say to the world.

“Some few I clung to longer than the others for the memories that they brought up. The ‘Heather Ballad’ took me back to a Yorkshire fell and a small boy

## Folly

who thought that heaven lay on its top. The 'Angelus' verses gave me again ourselves in the valley of the Itsu, and the sound of bells from an unseen village over the mountain—you remember?

'Thy twinkling lights not shown to us,  
Thy throbbing hearts not known to us,  
Thy bells alone wind-blown to us,  
Ye quiet folk that do God's will,  
Over the distant hill.'

And the answer—why, you wrote most of the answer—remember?

'All's well with fields not sown by you,  
With springing crops not grown by you,  
With beating hearts not known by you,  
With quiet folk that do God's will,  
Over the distant hill.'

But you have the whole, so I sent my copy overboard with the others.

"And when I had finished with it all, I had nothing in the world to do but write a line to this friend and that, as I could; and this for you. It was good to lie on the sunny deck, with cloudless blue above and waveless blue below, and to let a little kiddie pull my hair while its mother told me about her home among the Sierras, and her fear of the untried sea; or to smoke and tell tales with Basque fishermen from Fuenterrabía or Santander, who looked one day to see the salmon of the Oregon; or to weigh with vine-dressers from Malaga or Jerez their chances of making a fortune in the streets of New York; or to build air-castles with a

## Folly

ruined farmer from the bad lands of Aragon and to set them up in the wheatfields of Dakota. There were two hundred of them altogether; and I came to know most of them a little and some of them well—these unlucky, go-lucky children. And it opened my blind eyes, made me see more than I can ever tell you—just to live with them this little fortnight.

“One thing that came to me strangely was, I heard our own story told so many times over—with differences, but yet the same—among these poor peasants. We found it so tragic, so all-absorbing, and did not dream perhaps—or did you?—that it’s a common thing in the world. And what it stands for—that comes in the working out, whether it turns to torment or to joy; and I tell you, yours shall be joy.”

The cruelty of the dead to the living! . . . . It was a long while before she could read on.

“These people suffer no less pain than we—or very little; they keep more joy, I think, and perhaps in that way ease their lot. Some of them have worse things to bear: the crumbling away of character in a test, the discovery that an affection is built upon deceit, that the loved one has always been a stranger in soul. I cannot write you more now.

“LATER—I do not know the date.

“We have left the purple sea, and the broad path of the moon across the waves, and the fantastic floating life of the south; and we have come into the cold gray

## Folly

waters of the north, and the old moon will die in a night or two. I have been thinking, Folly—thinking of you and your life; and I have something to say to you which—another time.”

“He was worse that day,” said her heart.

“SATURDAY.

“I heard some one just now tell the day of the week. We have passed what they call Sandy Hook, and a long island with many lights—I forget its name; and we lie at anchor in a marvellous harbour, waiting for morning and the quarantine officers. I must try to write you to-night what I have to say, for to-morrow there will be much to do. It will be hard to say good-bye to the gentle voices and kind hands and loving hearts that I have learned to know on this voyage; but it will be the last farewell, I think. To-morrow a glimpse of the New World, and then. . . . I have been straining my eyes for the shadowy outlines of this world of giants; but can make out little besides the Liberty who flaunts her torch and crown of stars across the bay, and the long curves of a glittering bridge.

“Look now, how I have postponed saying to you what I must say. It is not easy to tell. I have waited until I should be able to put it so strongly that you will feel as I do; I will not wait until to-morrow I think, as I intended a moment ago.

“The great thing is—how get it into words?—the little thing. The secret of joy, as it seems to me now,

## Folly

is the immolation of selfishness and the unfolding, the expansion, the—I cannot say it clearly—flowering of one life in the lives of many. Not one other life, or two or three—but the most—the utmost extension of self in the lives of others. We had the cup of joy at our lips, we thought, you and I, and it was snatched away; but, by God, I see now that it was dashed at our feet that we might not drink the poison! Oh, I am writing in figures—I do not know how I am writing—I cannot find the words—but I can see this fragment of eternal truth. The scales have fallen from my eyes. . . .”

A blot. Here the pen had dropped from his fingers.

But lower down on the page was a scrawl, where he struggled on with his message: “By my love for you which is now—and now—and now—you must do as I say and be happy. You must leave the great high-roads where men crowd and struggle and push on, and walk in the little path—the by-path—I mean—the footpath of serv——”

That was all. The heart might break in vain to know more of the thought thus stifled by the swift silence.

There was also a typewritten sheet in the envelope—the consul’s explanation, useless details, forms, ceremonies. . . . She turned away from them and tried to think what he had thought dying thus between the open sea and the New World. Had he at the last turned back to the Old and remembered her, wait-

## Folly

ing and listening in the dawn that he was never to see? . . . .

She leaned against the unsheltering rock until she grew dizzy in the glare of the sun. And if she fell, she would seem to have broken her promise, she remembered; it was time to go home. There was no need for consideration; he had pointed the way for her, unmistakably. She must return among people and live her life out; while he, whose work was done, was at peace. And the way of service? The beginning of duty? The questions needed neither asking nor answering; she knew whither she must turn.

She rose, with shaking knees, and one hand laid along the rock to steady her on her homeward way, the other clinging to the letter.

But before she left the place, a strange new feeling swept over her overpoweringly, that the letter had brought its message and was hers no longer. She had no right to brood over it, to grieve over it; no time to dwell upon it with hopeless longing. It must go, and lead the way for those others that she had at home—ah, but not yet, not yet!

The voice within her was insistent: "Now, at once, before you weaken."

She knew that she had to obey, and she could not. The impulse was swift, strong-winged; but the rebellious heart dragged it to earth.

Two gulls flew out from under the cliff—white against the sea-blue.



## Folly

"If they alight on that boulder, I will not," cried instinct, seeking escape. And scarcely was the thought voiced, before she was able to clasp her treasure close, whispering, "Mine, mine."

But the voice within her was lifted up in sternness, and forbade her trifling with the powers of the soul. For herself she must decide whether she would obey or not.

"Not mine." Her hands faltered and shook, and sometimes paused altogether; but in the end she had torn her written message into hundreds of shreds, and had sent them fluttering down like a shower of snowflakes until they melted into the sea.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

“O FOLLY, FOLLY!”

CHRISTIE walked home but slowly, turning every few rods in the vain hope that she might be following. And when he reached the house, he still lingered some time among the myrtles, thus by a few moments to anticipate her coming. By mid-day he began to grow anxious; but still clinging to his trust in her, he went into the smoking-room and tried to turn his mind to indifferent matters.

Plans he made none, for the present situation he regarded as beyond his handling, unless fortune or chance gave him some clue. But he was tormented by elusive memories of the past: his clumsy wooing; the early days of their engagement, when she had teased him into love-making and laughed him out of it; the foolish ecstasy of their honeymoon; the pricks and stings of her growing discontent; the dangerous friendship; the quiet days after their son was born, and the sudden disaster. . . .

But there was no profit in such memories. He deliberately gave his attention to a new drainage system for a piece of bog-land on his estate; and was surprised

## Folly

that the tobacco he was smoking should be so bitter. After a time, he amazed himself by flinging down papers and pipe with a sudden curse, crying out upon himself for a fool in leaving her to herself. For how did he know what was in the letter he had been another sort of fool to bring down to her? And what was a mere promise to a desperate woman? He struggled against premonitions of evil, reasoned out carefully that even if the worst happened he must be the sufferer, not she; and therefore philosophy was always within his reach. He reminded himself that he had never known her to break her word; and the end of his thinking was that the leash he was endeavouring to keep upon himself gave way altogether.

He caught up his hat and started from the room; but as suddenly he retreated and softly closed the door again, brushing the sweat-drops of relief from his forehead. He had seen her, black against the sunshiny garden, at the far end of the dim hall.

He waited and listened for the tap of her slow footsteps on the wood floor; she must pass by, on her way upstairs. But the sound came to an end just outside the room, and was followed by a long silence.

He walked to the window and stared out among the rhododendrons, returned to the table and was fumbling restlessly among the papers of his land improvement scheme, when at last she knocked.

"I have come back, you see," she said, as he opened the door.

## Folly

He answered nothing, but with a gesture invited her within.

Unfastening her hat as she moved, she laid it on the table, and brushed back the hair from her temples, with an expression of relief. She was pale, but quite calm, as she said: "And I am ready to go back with you to Sunlands when you please."

There was a silence, during which they both heard voices in the hall, some visitor's, not distinguishable, and his mother's, saying clearly: "Well, my dear, I can only say that you're demanding the universe, if you expect to be happy all the time. Nothing short of that would do it."

The answer was lost in Christie's abrupt: "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I'm going to try to do my obvious duty—and that is to you."

"Thank you," said he; and she fully expected him to add: "Don't you think it's rather late?" But he did not.

"You said long ago—I mean last month, in Espinal—that you would take me back," she continued, wondering at his silence, and not perceiving that it was the leaven of some new thought working in him.

"True," he said, after a time. "But circumstances have altered since then."

"Have altered?"

He shrugged. "Need I explain?"

## Folly

"I don't understand, unless you mean that you won't take me back."

"I do mean that."

"That you won't?"

"I think not."

"But why?"

He smiled faintly and left her to seek her own answer.

"You mean, because people may have been talking?" she asked, with a flush.

"I think that needs no reply. But I am not aware that there has been gossip. If so, the best way"—he did not deem the conclusion worth pursuing.

"What then is your reason?"

"Will you be quite frank with me?" he asked in turn.

"Yes."

"Do you want to come?"

She considered carefully before she gave her reply: "There can be no question of 'wanting'; it is my duty."

He laughed. "I knew, of course. Sacrifice is more easily made than accepted, Florence."

"But if I'm willing . . .?"

"No, thank you."

"More than willing . . .?"

He was obstinately silent.

"It is my place . . ."

"Is it?" He turned upon her keenly. "Do you still claim the right to it?"

"I have no claim"—she began humbly; then, struck

## Folly

with sudden terror, asked: "Would you try to divorce me now?"

"I thought we had that out in Espinal. I'm sorry you think so badly of me," he said coldly. "If things were at a much worse pass than they are, I doubt whether I should turn to the courts for help."

"You might get a separation-order"—she spoke now with a coldness equal to his.

"What good would that do? We couldn't be any more parted than we are."

"So what it all comes to is——?"

"You must go your own way"—his harsh tone did not relent.

And while she was considering this new point of view, he continued, with the air of one who means to look at a question from all sides: "As for the name . . ."

"Oh, what does that matter?" she cried, with a touch of impatience.

"Pardon me, it's my name. It does matter to me."

"I know," she breathed, with quick remorse. "And I've done my best to drag it in the mud."

"Your worst, you mean," she read on his grim lips; but he said nothing.

"I was not thinking of myself or of my position," she tried to defend herself. "But I could still make a home for you and do what lies in my power . . ."

He had no scruple in cutting her short: "It's very good of you, but quite out of the question. We'd better come down to details of arrangement."

## Folly

"But what am I to do?" Her cry was almost involuntary; and she did not in the least realize that she was trying to throw her burden on him.

He seemed implacable. "That you must decide for yourself. You are free and you have the world before you."

"And Providence my guide?" she asked, with sudden bitterness. "You do well to remind me of my lost Paradise."

Then first he was aware of the unconscious brutality of his words; but his tone seemed to her still amazingly blunt and savage, as he said only: "I mean it. Do? There's a whole world full of things for you to do!"

There was something else working in him that had to come out: "You think, you women, that the love of a man is the only thing worth having in God's universe!"

She could not have known that in attacking her, he was fighting a weakness of his own.

"I am learning fast," she said, "but, as you say, it is harder for women. . . ."

"We all enter Fools' Paradise at some time or other; but most of us don't stay long. And when we come out, we still find the solid crust of the earth to set our teeth in. And a pitiful lot we should be if we didn't have to knock and batter ourselves against a few hard facts."

By this time, perhaps, she saw a little that he was talking for himself as well as for her.

## Folly

“Look how it is, Andrew,” she pleaded. “I tried to get out of my old self when the baby came; but after all, I loved him because he was mine. It was only a deeper form of self-love. And in this last—matter, although you cannot know what I would have given or done to have saved his life, it was for myself I wanted it. There is no escape, it seems, from the self that is the source of all misery and sin. . . . I thought there was none; but he gave me light . . . that it must be done by the way of serving many—all. . . .”

He stared at her in frank wonder. Was this the Folly who had once challenged the world to dare say she was not beautiful, who had trampled on all the rights of those that loved her and insisted that they love her still? . . . What was she saying now?

“And so the first and most obvious way seemed to be my duty to you; but if you cast me off, I must find another, I suppose.”

He foresaw many dangers, and said quietly: “One need not be in too much haste about doing. One might look on and learn for a few years, I fancy, and take it all in—or as much as one could.”

“And forget one’s self,” she concluded, wondering how Andrew had reached the same conclusion that Haldane had found by desperate experience, that life must be lost to be saved. No, not lost—that was only half the truth. It must lose its independence, nothing more—must be grafted into the life of the whole. Did many people—did all people, perhaps—come to the



## Folly

same knowledge in the end by different paths of experience?

“Andrew,” she said, holding out both hands to him, “if you could forgive me . . .”

He did not respond to her gesture or words, further than by an impatient shake of the head, which seemed to mean that his only desire was to be rid of the subject forever.

“I can never make it good”—she came a little nearer.

“Can anybody ever make anything good?” he answered, and allowed himself to take her pleading hands. “To be practical now, what do you propose to do? Stay on here?”

“No, I am going up to London. It will be better—at least, easier—there to watch and work and perhaps grow wise.”

“My poor girl”—he drew her head down to his shoulder and held it there; but did not kiss or attempt further caress—“you have been through the fire.”

“And you, and you,” she whispered quickly. “I can see now where I was blind before. And there will always be one bond between us, if nothing else . . .”

“If nothing else,” he assented. “But you will not shut me out, if you want help at any time?”

“You have said that so many times before,” she said, seemingly content, to his surprise, that her head should lie against his shoulder. “I will remember. But oh, if I had only been somebody else . . . some-

## Folly

body wise—not Folly—Folly. Good-bye. I shall see you now and then, of course. Perhaps some day you'll tell me that you can forgive me."

She snatched up her hat and was gone before he could say more; and upon second thoughts, he decided that they should part thus.

"Is the mater right, I wonder?" he asked himself. "If I took her back now, would it be the same old life? But what in the name of heaven could work the wonder so that she should ever be different?"

He hid his face with a sudden groan: "O Folly! Folly!"

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### BEWILDERMENT.

THE Gregory-Patrick wedding came as a great surprise, because it was over before most people realized that an engagement was imminent.

“You see,” exclaimed the bride, when people came to call at the barn-like house in Queen Anne Street, already beginning to assume an air of comfort, if not of frivolity, “the doctor was too busy and I was too old, besides having foolish scruples as a widow. So we gathered up our courage one day, and got it over without any fuss; and went to Paris for a fortnight. Oh, no, it’s not romantic; but I’ve been buying some old Japanese prints to-day. Come and tell me whether I’ve been badly done.”

There was a little gossip, of course,—far more, however, than about the mysterious flight of Mrs. Christie to Spain, and the extraordinary death of the poet Gore, which were not by most people connected; but the world soon settled down to its usual chit-chat, and Mabel was left to her house-furnishing in peace.

On a day towards the end of July, she looked up from her book with a cry of delight as Folly came in.

## Folly

“My letter is scarcely posted,” said she, “demanding your attendance upon my new dignity. It was good of me to write, too, when you haven’t answered the other in which I told you of our elopement.”

“I was glad for you—you must have known,” said Folly, “but you didn’t say when you would come back, and I supposed . . . Then, too, I have been alone for several weeks by the sea. . . .”

“I know”—Mabel folded her close. “Poor dear!”

But Folly pushed her aside with a slight laugh: “So now you’re settled for fifty years. How you will transform that man! Your house begins to look charming already.”

Mabel was relieved to find that Folly could allude to Gregory without embarrassment; but she wondered whether she would ever be able to bring them together.

“Is Andrew with you?” she asked.

“No, he’s at Sunlands—at least, well, he intended to go abroad at the end of the month; I don’t know whether he has actually gone.”

“And how is materkin?”

“Blooming, of course; but she pretended to shed a tear when I came away.”

“And are you in Sloane Street?”

“Not I. It wasn’t worth while to take the covers off the chairs. I told Andrew he’d better let the place on a seven years’ lease, if he could.”

“Seven!” repeated Mabel aghast.

“Yes. We’ve no earthly use for it.”

## Folly

“And Sunlands?” asked Mabel, trying to take the bull by the horns.

“Oh, he would never let that go,” answered Folly lightly. “He’d let moth and rust corrupt it first; but I don’t think they’re likely to get in, or thieves either, under Mrs. Brent’s rule. You have got ‘Monna Lisa,’ I see. Did it ever strike you, Mab, that there’s a resemblance between that lady and myself?”

“Heavens, no!” cried Mabel. “No more than between you and me. She was diplomatic, and she took life easily, while you—why, my dear—you have been knocking your head against stone walls all your days. Fancy that placid lady thinking it worth while to resist what is!”

“Well, I’m learning a little, perhaps, in the painful process,” answered Folly, smiling. “But that isn’t all. . . .”

“Why have you come to town?” was the brusque question.

“I’m looking for work.”

Mabel repeated the words to herself, and considered them in silence, before she ventured to ask timidly: “Work, did you say?”

“Yes, work,” answered Folly, still standing before “La Giaconda.” “It’s supposed to be a remedy for too much soul, isn’t it? Monna Lisa suffered from that malady, I know; that’s where I fancied the resemblance. She ought to have been made to do manual labour.”

## Folly

"Are you going to turn charwoman?" inquired Mabel.

"That's a possibility I had not considered. I've thought of almost everything else."

"But surely you have money enough—" began Mrs. Gregory.

"Heaps. Too much. I shall not work for money."

"What for, then?"

Folly hesitated a while before she answered: "Shall we say, to soil my hands? They have been clean all my life."

"Oh, no, I deny it," said Mabel, with energy. "I can still hear an old refrain from Paris: 'Pass the turpentine, will you?'"

"Well, anyway, that shows I tried to keep them clean, even in those days; now I want to make them dirty."

"Do you see any particular merit in such a performance?" asked Mabel, with gentle irony.

"The merit of change, at least." Folly's tone had become somewhat sharp, and Mabel did not press the matter.

"Am I to understand that you mean to take up portrait-painting in good earnest?"

"Far from it; nor any form of art—wood-carving, leather-work, china-painting or paper flowers. No, the back of my small talent was broken long ago; and I don't care to play the fool among admiring friends."

## Folly

"There I think you're wrong," protested Mabel. "I don't mean about the profession, of course. I decided to drop mine when I married. I shall have quite enough to do as a professional wife. But I don't see any reason why you shouldn't go in for some of the useful arts."

"Don't you?" said Folly. "I see two. One is, I haven't got the workman's hand; and the other is, they are ornamental, and what should I ornament? And without talent or object, I fail to see the good. Besides, why on earth should I?"

Mabel felt that her answer was lame: "It would give you an occupation and another interest in life, and you might develop an unsuspected talent. . . ."

Folly shook her head: "It would never do, Mab. Suppose I did develop a talent—which is unlikely enough—what should I do with the things when I had made them? Give them away? Sell them and pass the money on to charity? I don't want to be another amateur to burden the earth."

Mabel yielded the point: "Well, what do you mean to do?"

"What do people usually do in my case?"

"Not the stage?"—there was a certain fear in Mabel's eyes.

"No, dear, although I shouldn't wonder if I could make a success in high tragedy. But I have too much respect for the drama."

"I hope you won't try to write a book," said

## Folly

Mabel, with the air of one martyred by experience.

"I had not thought of that. But I should have nothing to write about but my own story. What remains, Mab?"

"Good works."

"Just so; but there are so many branches in this profession that I'm bewildered. I've considered most of them, I believe: ordinary church work; missions, foreign and domestic; slumming, with or without a curate; settlements, and district-visits, and model dwellings and so on. I suppose they are all excellent in their way; but they don't seem to fit into my disposition."

"I can't see you as a missionary," confessed Mabel, "preaching to natives grouped against a background of banana-trees, and telling them that they ought to wear clothes."

"And I can't embroider altar-cloths; and I think district-visiting is impertinent; and at a settlement I should want to talk heresy, anarchy and atheism all the time; and my model-dwellings would be the worst of the lot—so there I am!"

"Yes—the old Folly still," said Mabel, rejoicing in the fact.

But the Folly before her looked at her with grave eyes and mouth, and ignored her exclamation. "Do you think I should do for a nurse?"

"By no means," was the prompt answer.

"So I thought," said Folly. "I might stand the



## Folly

scrubbing and the polishing and all that; but I should not like the discipline. . . .”

“Don’t think of it for a moment,” said Mabel. “You would have all the nurses on their ears in a week; and the staff would resign in a body.”

“Well, then,” said Folly, “I’m in a hole, for I can’t find anything to do.”

Mabel looked anxious. “There’s one thing . . .”

“Now you are going to begin about Andrew,” Folly forestalled her, “and I may as well tell you that we have agreed not to make it up.”

“Did he agree?” cried Mabel astonished.

“My dear Mab, it was his own idea. Of course, I have treated him . . .”

“Yes,” answered Mabel. “I really think you have.”

“I was always a selfish . . .”

“Yes,” said Mabel again. “You were—almost.”

“However, the only amends I could make was to go back. I offered that, and he refused; so there’s an end of it.”

“But some day——?”

“No day.”

“I see his point of view,” mused Mabel. “It’s natural; but I did not expect it of him. He was always too fond of you, Folly. But really, you cannot blame him now, if after all that has happened . . .”

“I don’t blame him,” said Folly. “Far from it.”

“Can you not humble yourself?”

## Folly

“I did; but it made no difference. He thought it would not do; and I daresay he was right.”

“You do not want to go back?” asked Mabel, taking her hand.

“There’s a thing we have not spoken of,” said Folly quietly. “I thought I could not live through it; but I have borne it, as people do bear things. And I can go on and laugh when I should, and do what I ought to do, I hope; but as for wanting this or that, I want nothing but the balance, the peace that gives life a meaning. . . . I was thinking of Andrew, of course.”

“Ah!”—a light broke over Mabel’s face—“now I understand his point of view.”

“But you see that it is out of the question?”

“Stranger things have happened in this illogical old world.”

“I must go,” said Folly.

And Mabel: “Where are you stopping?”

“I have taken rooms for the present in Mecklenburg Street. Yes, it’s a queer little corner. I found it myself, and it’s near the slums.”

“But you should be here,” cried Mrs. Gregory, distressed.

“You would clip my freedom? No, but I’ll come in to dinner whenever you say, and—congratulate your doctor on his luck.”

“And your case?”

## Folly

“Oh, it can wait. We’ll talk of it again. I am watching, just watching the whirl of life as it goes on about me; and being quiet, I think I am learning a little. Perhaps one day I shall be wise.”

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### CORAM

SHE would not be persuaded to stop longer on that day, although she promised to return soon. On the doorstep she lingered with Mabel while the man whistled several times for a cab.

Then she grew restless: "I shall find one in the Square," she said, and fled before she could be stopped.

She liked the spray-like rain that blew against her hot face; and was rather glad when she found the Square deserted alike of cabs and of the loungers who scrape a living by calling them. On a sudden impulse, she turned from the roar of Oxford Street and walked homeward along the quiet ways.

She was a stranger among the back streets that lead tortuously and with many breaks from Regent Street to Tottenham Court Road; but she had a wish to feel the hum of the poverty-stricken life that lives out its years there. As she got into the thick of it, she was dazed and frightened rather than interested; jostled along between the fried-fish shops and the vegetable-stalls in the roadway; jumped upon by loathsome curs;

## Folly

stared at by red-faced women and impudent men-pigmies who roared with laughter as soon as she had passed; her ears teased by a barrel-organ, near which four dirty little girls were dancing ballet-steps in the rain. It seemed to her a world of low black houses, rank and stuffy; of sweet-shops that made one feel sick; of pink posters glaring out sporting news; of children eating bread and sardines on doorsteps; of pawn-brokers and public-houses; of pavements set out with pink flannelette at a penny three-farthings the yard; of second-hand boots and battered furniture; of scabby cats prowling in the paper-littered mud; of drunken shouts and tears and filth, that made her shrink with utter repugnance.

"I could never see them as *he* saw them," she thought, "not if I live to be as old—as old. I could never work in the slums."

Several times she lost her way and had to appeal to a policeman, before, at lamp-lighting time, she came out among the quiet houses of Russell Square.

As she walked along Guildford Street, dark and almost deserted, she was beset by a sense of escape from horrors of which she had never dreamed in her turbulent selfish early days; and by a certain humiliation in perceiving that from this part of the world's need she was excluded by the limitations of her own nature. *He* had learned to love such people, he had felt their common humanity with himself; he might have served them if he had lived. But how was she to serve who

## Folly

felt only loathing for their disease? She saw herself, for the first time, as infinitesimally small and feeble in her endeavour to cope with the grinding forces of the world. She reasoned that she must be crushed, one way or another, in the hurly-burly; but yet she wanted to try. Perhaps some little thing she might do, something that was wholly right, that would make use of all the powers of her heart and soul. . . . But to find it?

By this time she had reached the Coram Hospital, homely and comfortably lighted behind its forecourt of lawn and great trees, and at the gate, scarcely knowing why, she paused under a lamp to read the regulations for admission of foundlings.

“And what would a poor desperate woman do, who came in the old way to lay her baby on the doorstep of charity?” she asked herself. “And how is it with the unwelcome children who cannot enter for the red tape . . . ?”

She did not finish her question, for at her feet, half shadowed by the wall, sat a little girl, perhaps three or four years old, drooping heavily with sleep.

Forgetting her umbrella, the rain, her skirts, Folly stooped on the wet stones and tried to rouse the small vagrant. It was no easy task to get her to her feet; and when at last she stood, with one hand on the wall for support, and the other rubbing her eyes, Folly's heart was sick with pity and disgust.

It was not merely that she was so dirty, that one stocking hung about her ankle, and the other through

## Folly

a great hole showed a bruised and muddy knee, that her clothes had been cut down from those of an older child, that her hair was a hopeless mop, and her face streaked with rain or tears; it was the evidence of needless hopeless disease in her bleared eyes and scabbed skin, that made Folly's heart beat hot with rebellion.

“What are you doing here?” she asked sharply.

The child did not seem frightened, “Waitin' for muvver,” she droned.

“Where is your mother?”

A jerk of the head was the only answer.

“Can you take me to her?”

After a time came a mumbled: “She'd give it ter me”—she lapsed into drowsiness.

Folly shook her. “Tell me, child. Can you take me to your home?”

There was no answer; slumber had prevailed again over the little body even as it leaned against the wall.

Folly continued to hold her by one arm, and looked round for help, wondering what she should do. No one had passed by, and for the moment the street was empty of cabs and vehicles. Some distance away, toward the Gray's Inn Road, the light of a street-lamp fell upon the glazed mackintosh of a policeman. Seeing this, Folly hesitated no longer, but lifted the child, light enough even in her wet ungainly clothes, and carried her eastward.

The policeman stared for a moment at the well-

## Folly

dressed lady, unprotected in the rain, trailing her long skirt over the muddy pavement, and holding in her arms a pauper child. Then he grasped the situation.

"Hullo," said he, "here's Phyllis Eugenia again."

"You know her?" breathed Folly with relief.

"She's on my beat, marm. I'll take charge of the kid and blow 'er old woman up—she's Sippy Sade, that's who she is. Not all there, you know. It's a pity you've gone and got yourself muddy now; they ain't worth troubling about—them two."

"Where is her mother?" Folly would know.

"At the 'Rising Sun,' I'll bet a tanner. She don't bother to take the kid in out of the rain. I'll go now and tell her to look sharp or she'll get run in by the N. S. P. C. C."

"What's that?" asked Folly.

The constable was amused. "To think now of your not knowing that, marm! It's a society to keep parents from murdering their young 'uns. Give 'er to me"—for she still held Phyllis Eugenia—"she'll be getting too heavy for you."

He tried, not roughly, to wake the child; but failing, and perceiving that when he stood her on the pavement she was like to topple over, he took her in his arms, and with a nod to Folly was about to move away.

"Wait," she said. "Do you think I might go with you? I want to see Sippy Sade."

The constable considered, then shook his head. "She's not for the likes of you to be wasting your time



## Folly

on, marm. If you give 'er a bob, she'll drink it up in a mornin'. Most likely she was havin' a tea-party last night on 'arf-an'-'arf, or what ye like; and kept this youngster awake so that she carn't 'old 'er 'ead up. She's a bad lot—Sade. Lives in a room over a mews in Sapphire Street, and picks up a livin' anyhow. She's been warned times enough; she'll get to prison again—she's done time before—and the kid 'll end in the work'us. It won't do no good—your seein' 'er, marm. She's like all the rest of 'em; and when she's drunk, she uses language."

Folly scarcely heard him, so absorbed was she in a new idea which had seized upon her with a rush and crowded out every other thought.

"All right," she said hurriedly, "never mind." She felt in her purse for some silver. "Thank you very much. And look here, you'll be keeping an eye on Phyllis Eugenia, won't you? Well, if it ever comes to a question of the workhouse, let me know. Here's my address. I shall be grateful."

"Much obliged to you, marm," said he. "It's no manner of good trying to do nothin' for the old woman, but the young 'un . . ."

She turned away from him into the darkness, hailed a cab and in ten minutes was again on Gregory's doorstep.

She found Mabel alone in the drawing-room, and went to stand before her on the rug.

"No, I won't sit down. Yes, I know I'm muddy,

## Folly

and I've left my umbrella at the Foundlings' Home; but I had to come back at once to tell you that I think I've got the way. . . ."

"Yes, yes?" said Mab eagerly.

"Where's your husband?"

"Called out just after dinner—provoking! Tell me."

"It's the tale of Phyllis Eugenia," said Folly, and told it, not without a suspicion of tears.

"And what do you propose to do?"

"Do? Get a houseful of them, and look after them myself."

"With histories like that?" Mabel was horrified.

"You don't know the whole of it; her future would lie, partly at least, in my hands. I would give them all a chance."

"Would you go about the streets picking them up?" asked Mabel.

"Why, I might; but I can think of a better way—your husband. Through his hospital—see? Cases not bad enough to take in; too bad to turn away. I should get a home in the country, and have six or eight at a time, and make them well and happy and love them. . . ."

"And bring them up?" asked Mabel.

"Who knows? I might become a Captain Coram in time."

"It's worth trying," said Mabel. "Oh, yes,"—she reflected upon certain passages in Folly's history—"it's certainly worth trying."

## Folly

“Now where shall I find my house?” Folly’s mind was already leaping forward to practical details.

“There’s my old place, Low Eaves,” suggested Mabel. “The model-farm wouldn’t interfere; and since I’ve built the new house, I’m wanting a tenant for the other. Would you like to try? References exchanged, of course. Ah, there’s Greg”—as the door opened.

She had an anxious moment as her husband and Mrs. Christie shook hands. But Folly was earnest and seemingly unembarrassed, and plunged at once into the history of her new plan.

He listened smiling, suggesting here and there, until at last she grew suddenly timid, and asked: “Do you think it might possibly work?”

“I hope so,” said he, but reserved his opinion.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### LOW EAVES.

WITHIN a fortnight, Folly was mistress of Low Eaves, on the slope of a hill that looks across Surrey toward Sunlands less than thirty miles away. It pleased her, she could not tell why, to fancy a certain resemblance between the two houses. Both were old and low, with their bareness made beautiful by flowering climbers, clematis, wistaria, honeysuckle, jasmine, crimson Rambler and ivy; both faced the broad plain over which sweep the sea-winds from the South Downs to the North; and both were sheltered above by great woods—only at Low Eaves, instead of fir, grows beech.

Surely, Folly thought, as she stood in her own porch and let the breeze lift her hair, here on the heights, looking down upon the sunny fields, she might find peace of heart.

She rejoiced that there was much work to do. Her brisk little pony-cart, one of her first purchases, was kept busy rattling from painter to paper-hanger, and from plumber to odd-job man. There followed trips up to town, and shopping with Mabel, and despatching of household goods. She planned night and day.

## Folly

“As long as she has so much to do——” began Mabel, encouraged.

Gregory shook his head. “We shall see. But it’s a sound idea.”

When the furniture arrived, Folly was in such haste to send word to Gregory that she was ready for the first patient, that she rolled up her sleeves and put herself sadly in the way of the two women she had engaged to do the housekeeping.

But she proved not altogether useless. Her quick brain devised ways and means where the workmen had been at fault and the other women could only stand by and lament. She had a sense of pleased discovery upon finding herself deft with her fingers and fertile of expedients.

There was little about the practical ordering of a house that she did not attempt within the first week; and she learned much, from the hammering of nails to the management of smoky fireplaces. She was not content to plan the garden merely; she took a turn at the digging, while the gardener was having his noon-tide nap, and went indoors with blistered hands, and a fine high colour. She attempted cooking, and showed delicate perceptions in the way of sauces and seasonings, and a light touch for pastry. She studied a treatise on Dorking fowls; and only when her repeated efforts at milking produced nothing but bovine bad temper, did she reluctantly relinquish this duty to the boy.

On the great day when the first patient was ex-

## Folly

pected, she put on the uniform that she had devised as suitable, and after a long struggle with file and pumice to remove the stains of the soil from her hands, she took a last survey of the home that she could honestly say she had made for herself, in this new ordering of her life.

It would have been strange if she had not paused a moment in the lower hall to survey in the glass her tall figure in gray-blue linen, with broad white collar and cuffs, her fair head smooth and demure, and the quiet eyes, now more blue than gray, that met hers serenely. "It can't be Folly," she said to her image. "It must be somebody else."

She could not restrain a glow of satisfaction as she went over the house, different as it was from her old ideal of a dwelling-place. Sunlands was the home of fine traditions, full of the memories of lives well lived; this was nothing more than a haven for unhappy little ones with no past, and no future but that which she might be able to give them.

Upstairs were the two big nurseries: the day-room, with its cupboards full of treasures, its books and pictures and flowers; the dormitory, as complete as a hospital ward, with every contrivance to lend comfort and ease pain.

In these two rooms, Folly had a secret joy that she shared with no one else, for here alone it was that she was spending and intended to spend the small income of Haldane's hard-earned money. Not a penny, she

## Folly

vowed, should go for other purpose than to sweeten childhood. Some day, she thought, when she could bear to talk again, she would tell her little ones how this joy and that, and all joys, came to them from "Uncle Hal." Such fame he would have loved. But the time for that was not yet.

Aside from the nurseries, were several small bedrooms for poor guests, two or three, who might have outgrown babyhood.

Downstairs was the dining-room, which could also be used as a school-room, if need arose of teaching; as were the kitchen and scullery, together with perfectly appointed store-rooms, where anything not perishable could be had for the asking; and in one of these was a small dispensary.

One sitting-room Folly reserved for herself; and this was furnished in a way curiously in contrast with everything that she had known and loved before. It was bare, but not cold, done with soft greens for summer; and there were golden-toned curtains, now put aside, to be brought in for winter. The furniture obtruded itself only as intended to rest weary bodies; and the few pictures were all of a spiritual significance, such as: Walther Firlé's "Lord's Prayer" with its humble "Give us this day our daily bread," its piteous "Forgive us our trespasses," and its patient "Thy will be done"; Andrea del Sarto's "St. James," with little children clinging to his robe; Carpaccio's "St. George," in headlong tilt at the dragon of evil; Anton Mauve's

## Folly

“Hauling of the Log,” with its suggestion of reposeful labour. And there were no books except a little heap on Folly’s writing-table, such as: “Practical Hints to Nurses,” “The Mother’s Guide,” “Childhood’s Accidents,” “Simple Remedies,” “Lectures on Sanitation,” “The Successful Gardener,” “Cooking for Convalescents,” “Gymnastics in the Home,” etc., besides a sheaf of journals and pamphlets.

Content as she was with her nest, Folly was happier outdoors in the garden, now wild and overgrown, but to be reclaimed next year and crowded with sweetness; and in the big orchard, hedged in with quick and privet and holly and wild sloe, where hammocks could be swung between the apple-trees.

She wandered out upon the breezy hillside, not thinking much, except to wonder now and then whether she had prepared every possible thing for the comfort of her little guests, but for the most part content to drink in the quiet of the summer afternoon; and to link together chains of moon-daisies for some child that had perhaps never seen such a thing.

It was only when she stood at the edge of the beech-wood, looking toward Sunlands, that her mind roved back to the remembrance of her own history. For the first time, she fancied she could see it as one perfectly detached. What a troublous and troublesome woman she had been, always gambling for happiness and losing at every throw! But she had learned that it came not in the taking, or even in the giving, of love



## Folly

alone; and whether it came in the path of the selfless love that lives only to serve—that she would soon know. It seemed to her now that she had always been struggling against the inevitable, against death, and against spiritual forces more terrible than death, the indissoluble union of spirit to flesh, the indissoluble barriers between spirit and spirit. . . . Never once had she won. The great mysteries were still the great mysteries. But somehow she had come out into the clear sunny air above, with nothing to think, or to do, but to make well and happy a few sick children, to lighten, even if imperceptibly, the turbid misery of this world.

Toward sunset, she went down to the gate, in momentary expectation of the pony-trap. There as she waited, she fell into a sadder mood, being, no doubt, over-tired; and she wondered whether she would ever be able to persist, to hold out fighting, to make a success of this—she who had so often failed before.

But she forgot everything at the first glimpse of a gray-cloaked nurse, and ran out into the grassy road to meet the slow vehicle.

“What have you brought me?” she cried, eager as a child for a birthday present.

The nurse opened her gray cloak, and showed a baby, as little and frail as Folly had not dreamed a baby could be.

“It has been fed on peppermint-water,” said the nurse.

## Folly

And Folly, dropping her daisy-chain upon the ground, clasped the little bunch of bones to her heart, feeling that the new peace was in very deed descending upon her.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

### MOTHER AND SON.

“WELL, Andrew, well?” Mrs. Christie sometimes affected a little brusqueness of surprise to mask her exceeding joy when her son unexpectedly arrived on a visit at Westmouth.

“Well, mater? You look as fresh as your snowdrops this spring.”

“No, I’m like those ugly everlasting flowers; I never fade,” she returned, with her face crinkling into many smiles. “How’s Sunlands?”

“Mortal empty.”

“And mortal dull?”

“Dull enough.”

“Is that why you went to the far steppes and the Balkans and all those other outlandish places that nobody ever heard of?”

“I daresay. They were tolerably dull too.”

“No doubt. I’m afraid it’s yourself that’s dull. How long is it now since Folly left you to your own devices?”

“It’s nearly a year, mater.”

“And you don’t like it?”

## Folly

He laughed.

"Then it's high time for you to look her up and fetch her back."

He shook his head in a decided negation.

"I might die any day, you know."

"Oh, no, you won't, mater. You'll outlive me yet."

"I hope not," said she, with sudden seriousness. "I've outlived so many." A tear twinkled a moment in the corner of an eye; but she whisked it away before he saw it.

"It's your only solution, boy," she continued.

He looked at her with grim incredulity. "Bless you, mater, she doesn't want to come."

"When have you asked her?"

"You know very well—last June—here."

"I thought so. Did you ever know Folly to be of one mind for a year together?"

He hesitated a moment, then came out with his thought. "Yes, she's been remarkably consistent for three or four years in her opinion of me."

"Just about time, then," she observed imperturbably, "for her to change again. She liked you at first."

"Did she?" he asked. "Huh!"

"I'm not sure," she continued, as if musing aloud, "that you didn't make a mistake in sending her away last spring."

"My dear mater, she pitied me!"

"My dear Andrew, pity is not altogether such a bad thing to have."

## Folly

“Well”—for a moment he seemed at a loss, then asked: “Did anyone ever offer you a stone when you were hungry?”

“I don’t call pity a stone; it’s more like the flour that makes up into the bread of love.”

He considered this. “Not some kinds of pity. It may be very starchy—dutiful pity—hers was—but not nourishing. Shall we talk of something else?”

“So you won’t go and look her up?”

“No, I don’t think it would be of any use.”

“Do you know where she is now?”

“No.”

“But you could find out?”

“I daresay Mrs. Gregory knows; and, of course, you do.”

“Why not——?”

“I tell you it’s no use, mater. She’s happier without me.”

“You speak with amazing assurance, considering the fact that you haven’t seen her for a year.”

“I judge the future by the past,” said he.

“Which is an extremely foolish thing to do. You never know what good man is going to break out and commit a murder, or what sinner is going to reform.”

“Has she reformed?” he asked, taking the sense of her words.

Her eyes twinkled, but she said nothing.

“Have you seen her lately?”

“About a fortnight ago.”

## Folly

"Where was she then?"

"Ah—ah!" she jeered at him.

He flushed. "Well, it's only natural . . ."

"To be sure. You wouldn't trouble to look her up; but when the information knocks at your door, you open in a hurry."

"Have your laugh," said he, patiently.

"So I shall. But I shall not tell you, all the same."

"Well, it wouldn't make any difference anyway. But why not?"

"Because I don't think it would be good for you to know. You might do damage."

"What damage?" he asked, staring.

"Oh, flower-beds and window-panes and the like—you're only a boy, after all."

"I hope you don't think I should go to see her," he hastened to reply.

"My dear boy, knowing how you dislike the woman, I should never dream of such a thing!"

He perceived that there was mischief somewhere; but her eyes were demure, though her underlip trembled slightly.

"My dear mater, you're too many for me," he confessed. "What are you getting at?"

"The good of your soul, my friend," she retorted unexpectedly.

"And what do you think would be good for my soul?"

"I think it would be good for your soul," she re-

## Folly

peated gravely, with another sudden quirk, "to give an account of yourself for the past six months."

He moved about the room, restlessly fingering her books and papers, and the ornaments on the mantelpiece, and needlessly poking at the fire.

"I sailed from Brindisi"—he began, and ended with an abrupt "Bosh!"

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, with affected surprise. "And then——?"

"We landed——" said he, and again came to an untimely end.

"How interesting!" says she. "You landed—yes? And walked ashore, no doubt? And met custom-house officials? And in time returned home? Ah, yes, there's nothing like travel for improving the mind."

"Mater," he pleaded, "there's a time for teasing . . ."

"Boy," she answered, with equal solemnity, "I'm sure that's not in Ecclesiastes."

But she could not stem the tide of his question: "You might just tell me how she is?"

She deliberately removed her glasses and began tapping them against the palm of her hand. "She's very busy with her family."

He wheeled upon her and stared. "Her family?"

She smiled and nodded.

"What family?"

She looked at him reproachfully, as if he ought to have known all about it; and his bewilderment in-

## Folly

creased. "You mean cousins and aunts and that sort of thing?"

"No, I mean her children," she answered serenely.

He stood before her with his hands in his pockets and studied her face anxiously. "Mater, have you been quite well lately?"

"Yes, thank you, boy; and I'll trouble you not to cast doubt upon my sanity. I know what I'm talking about better than you do," she answered, with all the briskness in the world.

"That is certain; I should like information," he answered meekly.

"Well, the next time she comes here—and she's a good girl about keeping up with me—I'll see if I can get her to invite you down. . . ."

"But where? I wish you wouldn't be so mysterious, mater."

"Why, boy, mystery is the spice of life to me," she retorted.

"You forget that it may be a little peppery to me," said her son.

"Ah, well, perhaps your soul may be needing pepper just now."

He shrugged as one who should say: "What can be done with a woman like this?"

She pulled him up sharply: "Come, now, shall I invite you both here at the same time?"

"No, thanks," said he quietly.

"You refuse to see her then?"



## Folly

"I think it's better . . ."

"But you don't know what may have happened during the year. I never told you."

"Something seems to have happened; but hardly the thing that alone would justify our making it up."

"Then you won't go and fall on your knees to her?"

"No."

"And you won't let her come and fall on her knees to you?"

"Least of all—even if she would. Mater, can't you allow a fellow a decent pride?"

"Pride ruined Lucifer," said she. "And what are you so proud of? Your obstinacy?"

He went to lean over the back of her chair, and took her face in his hands. "Mater, you are commonly a woman of extraordinary perception and judgment and sense; but in this case I think you are singularly lacking in all three."

"Thanks for the compliment," she said. "I suppose, after that, I'd better change the subject. What do you propose to do now?"

"Go back to Sunlands and improve the estate."

"But who was talking about dullness?"

"Will you come and live with me then?"

She turned away to hide dim eyes. "Thank you, boy; but I came here when your dear father died, and that's nearly forty years ago. I couldn't move back again."

He understood that, but answered only: "Well,

## Folly

then, I shall make hard work my companion, and turn model landlord.”

“And keep Folly out of your life altogether?”

“She keeps herself out,” said he, and hastened to add: “She can’t help it, of course.”

His mother looked at him, and could find no relenting. “I must drop the matter, I see. You’ll be going up to town presently?”

“In a day or two.”

“I thought so. Never two minutes in one place. You ought to be chained to something—a pillar, say. Will you take a message from me to Mr. Gregory?”

“Gregory?”

“To be sure. When they were here in the winter, he gave me a tonic that lifted twenty years off my shoulders in a month. I want to know whether I’m to get more of it, or whether it would take away another twenty years and make me look ridiculous. Or, you might ask him to bring Mabel down some week-end soon. Then he could see for himself. Oh, it’s all right, boy. I’m a jolly sight better than you are . . . to quote your own slang. And perhaps you’ll just convey a letter to Mab at the same time.”

Well, she might have used the post, to be sure; but he assented to her request, without giving it particular consideration.

“Oh, these young people,” she murmured to herself, as he was leaving the room, “these young people!”

To her he was still a boy of twenty; and he and Folly

## Folly

were but foolish children for whose happiness she conspired with all her heart.

“Have you said your last word?” she demanded.

“About what?”—he turned.

“About Folly.”

“That? Oh, yes.”

As soon as he had closed the door, she fell a-laughing gaily.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

### THE CONSPIRACY.

THEY were only three at table the night that Christie dined in Queen Anne Street. Gregory, to be sure, had suggested a fourth; but Mabel shook her head, laughing.

"No, there's a plot afoot. Materkin is ring-leader, and you and I must play into her hands to-night. Andrew won't make up with Folly, and Folly won't make up with Andrew; so we propose to make them make up, ourselves."

"Better not meddle," he chilled her.

"You kill-hope!"

"But if they don't care for each other, they're better apart."

"Well, perhaps, if they don't; but materkin and I are not at all sure that there isn't some meaning behind their violent objections to meeting; and we are sick of their shilly-shallying."

"But what can you do?"

"Wait and see. Meanwhile, I'm inviting him to dinner, as I began to tell you."

So Christie came alone; and notwithstanding

## Folly

Mabel's best efforts, there was at first a certain awkwardness in the situation. Indeed, occasionally the two men eyed each other with a kind of grim humour that recognized the fact and made the best of it.

But it was not until they were having coffee in the library that Gregory, who was on the watch, could detect any trace of diplomacy.

"You're looking rather seedy, Andrew," she began abruptly.

"Ah, well, don't forget that I'm a country squire away from his acres."

"I suppose you've been having so many adventures abroad that England seems slow to you."

"Rather not," said he, "as I'm going down to Sunlands in a day or two to settle for good, I hope. I like farming, you know."

Mabel sent a long reflective look to her husband, before she lisped: "So do I. And you've never yet seen my model-farm at Low Eaves; you ought to go down. I've made a good many improvements lately."

Gregory stared at his wife; but had the sense not to protest.

"You don't manage it yourself; that counts for nothing. You're an amateur," said he idly.

"All the same, it might give you points. It is in good hands. Would you like to go down this week-end? Greg would take you."

"Delighted," murmured Gregory.

"Thanks," began Christie, "I hardly know . . ."

## Folly

But she would not let him escape.

"To-morrow is Friday. What time, Greg——?"

He shook his head, and she frowned at him.

"I'm busy," he began, and concluded with a hasty: "There's the telephone," and retreated, as she frowned again.

The two left together talked idly; or rather, Mabel chattered with careful aimlessness, while Christie smoked and gave brief replies and stared into the fire.

Presently she made an excuse for following her husband, and found him collecting his instruments, prepared to go out.

"Just a word," said she. "I shall send him to that three-thirty train from Victoria, and tell him to go on even if he doesn't see you at the station, as you're given to clutching the end of a train by the guard's van—contrary to law and reason. And you're to miss the train, understand?"

"Not difficult," he grunted, "as I'm due at the hospital from two to four."

"Right enough. And I'll telegraph to Folly to send to meet a new patient—see? It's great! Meanwhile, I'll go prepare his mind."

"How about hers?" he asked, drawing on his gloves.

"Dear man, I've been working on hers for the past six months; if it isn't prepared now, it never will be!"

"Just like you women," he growled. "No sooner does she get settled and comfortable, than you want to stir it all up again. Better let well enough alone."

## Folly

"But, Greg," she began, and decided not to argue at this time. "It would please materkin," she continued, "and the dear old lady has been industriously breaking ground on both sides."

"Without success—eh?"

"Wait and see," she answered.

But she found the preparation of Christie's mind rather a delicate matter; and after one or two attacks and feints towards the forbidden theme, she pretended to sheer off and introduce a new subject.

"I haven't told you about the convalescent home that Greg's interested in, have I?"

"No," said he, but did not evince any great interest in the topic.

Undiscouraged, she gave him an account of the scheme, and grew enthusiastic over details.

"I suppose you want a subscription?" he concluded.

Oh, dear, no, Mabel had not meant that at all!

At this he was genuinely surprised and asked: "Where is this little Paradise?"

"Oh, in the country," she said, in a large way; and added for his further enlightenment, "not very far out."

"I see. And you take charge of it?"

"Oh, no, there's a—a matron in charge. Such a capable woman, and so charming!"

"It's a success then?"—he made conversation. "How long have you been at it?"

"Oh—months," said Mabel grandly. "Perhaps some day you'd like to go there?"

## Folly

"No, thanks," answered Christie. "I've let myself in for quite enough."

Mabel's eyes danced as she said to herself: "I think you have; I really think you have." Aloud she sighed: "I'm rather sorry for the matron. She has had a hard life—poor thing! Such a nice woman, and she is separated from her husband." She looked at him, unabashed: "I'd like to see that husband."

He was not much interested, but he asked patiently: "What's the trouble?"

"Oh, I don't know"—Mabel waved her hands airily. "I have heard only one side of the story; I'd like to know what his defence is. But Mrs. . . ."

She hesitated, and he looked at her in sudden sharp suspicion.

". . . Westerbeck," she said serenely; and stopped, amazed at her own invention. "O Mab, Mab," she chuckled, "does lying come so easy? And wherever did you get the name?"

He did not notice any delay, as she continued: "Mrs. Westerbeck is a woman I would believe against almost anybody else under oath."

"Me, for example?" he asked, trying to joke.

"Not you. If she said one thing and you another, I don't know where the truth would lie. But I'm boring you with my charities?"

He did not deny this.

Presently, when he rose to go, he turned to her without preamble. "Have you seen her lately?"



## Folly

"Yes, she was here last week. We went shopping together. She seems very well."

He struggled with another question, under her kind eyes; but it would not come out.

"She's very busy," she suggested, to help him on.

"So the mater said, and talked nonsense about a mysterious family. I take it she's found some poor relations to adopt?"

"That's it," said Mabel. "Poor relations. But"—she anticipated further questioning—"don't ask me who they are, for I can't tell you."

"Is she often in town?" he queried; and called himself a fool for his pains.

"H—m," said Mabel, with her head on one side, "so-so." Then she assumed an air of discovery. "Come, now, why shouldn't you two be friends again, some day?"

He stiffened. "I am not aware that we are otherwise now."

"Otherwise!" she repeated, laughing. "But you know what I mean. If I give you her address, will you go to see her?"

"Just what the mater said; I shall begin to think there is a plot soon."

"Dear, dear!" she began; but had the grace not to pursue the fib. "When one comes to think about it calmly, what is it after all that keeps you apart now?"

Her *now* gave him his answer: "Memory."

"But memory's a dead thing," she protested.

## Folly

“What is so alive as that which is dead?”

“It sounds like an epigram,” said she, “so I’m sure it’s only half true.”

“Has she ever indicated to you the slightest wish to come back to me?”

Then Mabel decided to abandon the argument: “I can’t say that she has. But I don’t see . . .”

“Don’t you?”—he laughed. “I must be going.”

“About to-morrow,” she admonished him. “Mind you don’t miss your train, because the farm trap will be waiting at the station. I’m sending some things down. Greg will be all right if he should be late. There are always trains enough, and he can get a cab at the station. I hope—they’ll be good to you—if you have to go down alone.”

He thought her speech a little odd, but made no comment.

“I wonder!” she cried to herself, when he had gone. “Oh, I wonder!”

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

### THE NINTH GUEST.

TOMMY, the boy who drove the pony trap from Low Eaves to the station, flattered himself that he had a keen eye for patients; but when, on this day, after gathering up various parcels and boxes from the platform, he cast a diagnosing glance over the passengers, he found none. The only stranger who did not at once set out for his destination was a big red-faced man in a shabby tweed ulster and cap, who, however, to the boy's disgust, came up to the trap and asked: "From Low Eaves?"

Tommy gaped at the size of the new patient.

"Well, Mr. Gregory seems to have missed this train. Shall you wait for the next?"

"No, sir," answered the boy, and added, with a certain delicacy for the feelings of the burly-looking invalid: "Was it you they was expecting, sir?"

"I believe so," said Christie.

Thereupon Tommy received him among his miscellaneous collection; but he had made the old pony trot for nearly a mile before he recovered from his amazement.

## Folly

"We usually gets 'em smaller," he thought aloud.

"Eh?" asked Christie, absorbed in his own reflections.

But the boy blushed and refused to repeat his remark.

However, Christie roused himself to ask: "How far?"

"About another mile, sir."

"How big is the farm?"

"The farm? Oh"—with an air of detachment and condescension—"that's about seventy-five acres or so."

"And who runs it?"

"Mr. Mills."

"And what do you raise chiefly?"

"We?" The boy grinned, then chuckled, and said with laboured facetiousness: "If you was to ask me, I should say it was kids, sir. And to tell the truth, we was expectin' another to-day."

Christie looked uncomfortable. "What do you mean?"

"No harm, sir. It only come across me when you ask me what we raise, that every blame thing that's growed here goes to fatten up them kids."

"Large family—eh?"

"Well, I dunno what you'd call large, sir. There's eight young 'uns, and the two Sisters, besides the missus, the cook and the housemaid, the gardener and me, not counting extra help had in sometimes. And none of the kids isn't more than six years old; and not

## Folly

a healthy one among the lot. I wasn't looking forward to another myself; but the missus never will say no."

"But I was asking you about the farm," pursued Christie.

"Oh, the farm," said the boy scornfully. "We ain't got nothing to do with that—nothing whatever."

He jumped down, opened and closed a gate into a by-lane. Christie forgot question and answer in thinking how much the country resembled Sunlands.

He said no more before they pulled up at a low red farm-house, with a steep tiled roof overhanging its wealth of creepers.

At the door stood a nurse in uniform, who looked past him at the boy. "Haven't you got it?"

"He's the only one I could find," growled the lad, "and he said you was expecting him."

The nurse advanced a step or two. "Did you wish to see some one here, sir?"

"I'm afraid there is a mistake," said he, and explained that Gregory had missed the train.

"We were expecting another patient," said she, "but not the doctor."

"Patient? What is this place then?"

"Low Eaves, sir."

"Right," said he; but struck by a sudden thought, stopped short in the very act of getting out. "Is this a model-farm or a convalescent home?"

"Both," said the nurse, smiling. "Perhaps you'd better come in and see the matron, sir."

## Folly

He followed her, somewhat dazed as he tried to piece together the extent and reason of Mabel's perfidy; but the clue escaped him.

The nurse left him by the hall fire, whence he could hear murmuring and low laughter from an adjoining room.

"What name shall I say?" she asked, with her hand on the door.

"Never mind; she won't know me," said he, remembering suddenly that this would be the lady with the curious name of Westerbeck.

Across the room he saw a woman on a low stool—a woman in gray and white, with fire-gleam on her hair, and her face hidden behind a rampantly affectionate bald-headed baby. She was endeavoring to free herself from the clutches of the little crowing monster, but did not succeed until the nurse went to her assistance, at the same time announcing the visitor.

Then, still keeping the baby and pressing his bobbing head and eager hands against her shoulder, she rose, very tall and straight, and came forward to meet the stranger, showing a pink face and a halo of loosened fair hair. . . .

In the silence that followed, the baby gave a smothered wail of protest against suffocation.

"How do you do?" said Mrs. Westerbeck stiffly. "Won't you sit down?"

Then she turned to the nurse. "Take Teddy up-

## Folly

stairs now, Sister. It's almost his sleepy-time. And don't forget Emily's medicine—there."

It was a matter of some seconds, detaching the limpet-like Teddy, who clearly preferred his present rock, and expressed his choice loudly; but presently Folly herself closed the door, after listening there until the wails of the afflicted infant died away into silence.

## CHAPTER XL.

“WHY NEED WE?”

SHE motioned him to a chair, and returned to her stool by the fire.

“I suppose you want to see me, or you wouldn't have come?”

“By no means,” he answered bluntly. “I did not dream that you were here. I expected to go over a model-farm.”

“Baby-farm?” she asked, with a gleam of her old fun; but sobered quickly: “You came down alone?”

He explained the trick which had been played upon the two of them; but she did not seem vexed. “You can still go over the farm; the babies are only a modern improvement. Shall I send for Mills?”

He was looking at her, and she turned away to the fire. He could not put into words the change he found in her. It was not due only to the plainness of her dress; it seemed as if her expression had altered her very features, so that the forehead was broader in its serenity, the eyes were larger in their thoughtfulness, the nose was less piquant, the mouth sweeter and more firm. The very set of the chin suggested reasonableness and even humility. He wondered how far



## Folly

the changes were real, and how far he fancied them. But she turned at last and met his glance squarely.

“Well, am I really so different?”

He wanted time to answer that, so waived it: “I am beginning to see a thing or two. You have a large family?”

“Eight,” said she, “and I can do with a ninth; but there we must stop for the present. I really haven’t the room. Some day I may add a wing; I’m thinking of it. But the need is so great, and I’m but a drop in the ocean. Each case seems more urgent than the last. I expected another to-day.”

“But not the one who came? That’s not so urgent?” he found himself asking.

“You would like to see the farm?” she pursued.

“It’s coming on to rain,” said he, from the window to which he had retreated.

She remembered his old scorn of weathers, and hastened on to: “Will Gregory turn up later?”

“He intended to miss that train . . .”

“True, so you said; I am forgetful,” she murmured.

The rain beat against the window, as he wondered how the deuce he could get away without a scene; while she, by the fire, was trying to remember parallel instances of sensible people who had found themselves in such a peculiar position, and what they had said and done.

“I see there is no train until six-thirty,” he observed, consulting a pocket-guide.

## Folly

"No—unfortunately," she answered to the fire.

"Still, if I take it slowly . . ."

"Oh, you must let the boy drive you," insisted the courteous hostess.

"No need to trouble him and the pony. I prefer to walk," was his brusque reply.

"Even then," said she, after an uncomfortable pause, "you could not spend an hour and a half covering two miles. Will you come and look over my—baby-farm?"

She gave him no time to blunder out the refusal that rose to his lips; but led the way upstairs.

On the second step, however, she paused and glanced at him over her shoulder. "Do you remember how I used to scoff about babies and baby-farms? We never know what we are coming to."

Again she left him speechless; and straightway proceeded to explain in detail the arrangements and working of her house.

When she paused, rather wistfully, perhaps, for praise, he confessed that it was admirable; but he did not tell her that the chief of his admiration was for herself as the centre of its life. He did not wonder that the crippled or starveling babies should crawl and hop to her, or stretch out their arms to be taken up. He accepted it as a matter of course that her criticisms and suggestions should be to the point, and received with deference; but when he watched her giving a new nurse a practical lesson in gruel-

## Folly

making, he judged that she had come a long way in her progress.

"I am afraid the gardens are very wet," she concluded, as they stood in the hall together. "But I have forgotten all about tea. You'll have a cup? I'll ring at once."

He was looking at his watch. "I have just time now if I make haste."

She smiled at him, with some constraint. "Miss it; there's another." And she led the way into her sitting-room.

There, in an oppressive silence, he presently announced: "I'm going down to Sunlands in a day or two."

"Our windows look that way. I suppose it's not thirty miles across?" she answered softly.

"You have not forgotten the place then?" he began; and silently cursed the maid with the tray.

She never answered that question; but kept the ball of their talk flying as lightly as possible from one topic to another, until the form of tea was over and the tray was removed.

His despair grew with the twilight that was setting in with heavier rain. He left the window, where he had been standing, and came over to her side.

"It's getting late," said he, gruffly. "You didn't shake hands when I came; will you now that I am going?"

She held her fingers loosely clasped about one

## Folly

knee, and smiled up at him. "Why go?" she asked.

He thrust his hands into his coat pockets and studied her face. "Why not?" he asked in turn.

"Because I invite you to stay."

He could not believe that he had understood. "You want me to stay?"

She nodded, looking away from him.

And still he could not accept the fact. "Folly, do you know what you are saying?"

He fancied, but was not sure, that she nodded again.

"What does it mean?"

"It means—what you like to think," she whispered.

He took a turn across the room, his hands still in his pockets.

"You do not realize what I should like to think."

Her eyes gleamed upon him suddenly. "Can't you make me?"

"Make you?" he repeated, coming again to look down upon her. "Make you realize it?"

"Perhaps," she said hurriedly, "I ought to be more humble. I've been trying to get to it all the time; but I thought—I think I thought—you would help me out more. Please, Andrew, take me back."

He laid his hand on her shoulder. "You want to come?"

She nodded.

His next words surprised her: "You seem happy here."

## Folly

"Yes," she confessed.

"Then better stay where you are happy," said he harshly, as he walked away to the window again.

She too rose, with a sudden little laugh, and crossed over to him; but as he turned, retreated and went from picture to picture, with an occasional backward smiling glance, the whole round of the room, as if from station to station in a spiritual progress; and in the end came back to him from the other side. She knew well that he could not but watch.

"It has been like that with me; I went away and I swing back; but if you will not have me. . . ."

She paused in her threat. "What then?"

"I suppose I shall swing away again; but whether I shall ever come back to you after that, I do not know. The circles get larger each time, and take in more people. . . . Well?"

Abruptly he seized her, and drew her close to study her face. "But you have been happy here without me?"

"Happy?" she repeated softly. "There are many widowed and orphan, and some that are childless in the world; and they have to learn to be happy. It can be done. Yes, I have been happy here; but it does not follow that I shouldn't be a little happier—with you."

She held him off with the sudden question: "And you—how do you get on without me?"

"I can manage," said he, with a new light coming into his eyes.

"Decently?"

## Folly

“I hope so.”

“Then if we both can, why need we?” she cried, with a laugh that turned to tears. And then he believed.

In the silence that followed, he knew that this was no surrender of the fruits of her hard-won victory; but rather a sharing of the treasure that she had garnered from sorrow and the love of little children. And she was content to believe that she was on the footpath to the citadel of peace.

“Folly,” said he, after a time, “or must I say Wisdom? . . . Well, Folly then, I am thinking that the mater will say, ‘I told you so from the beginning.’”

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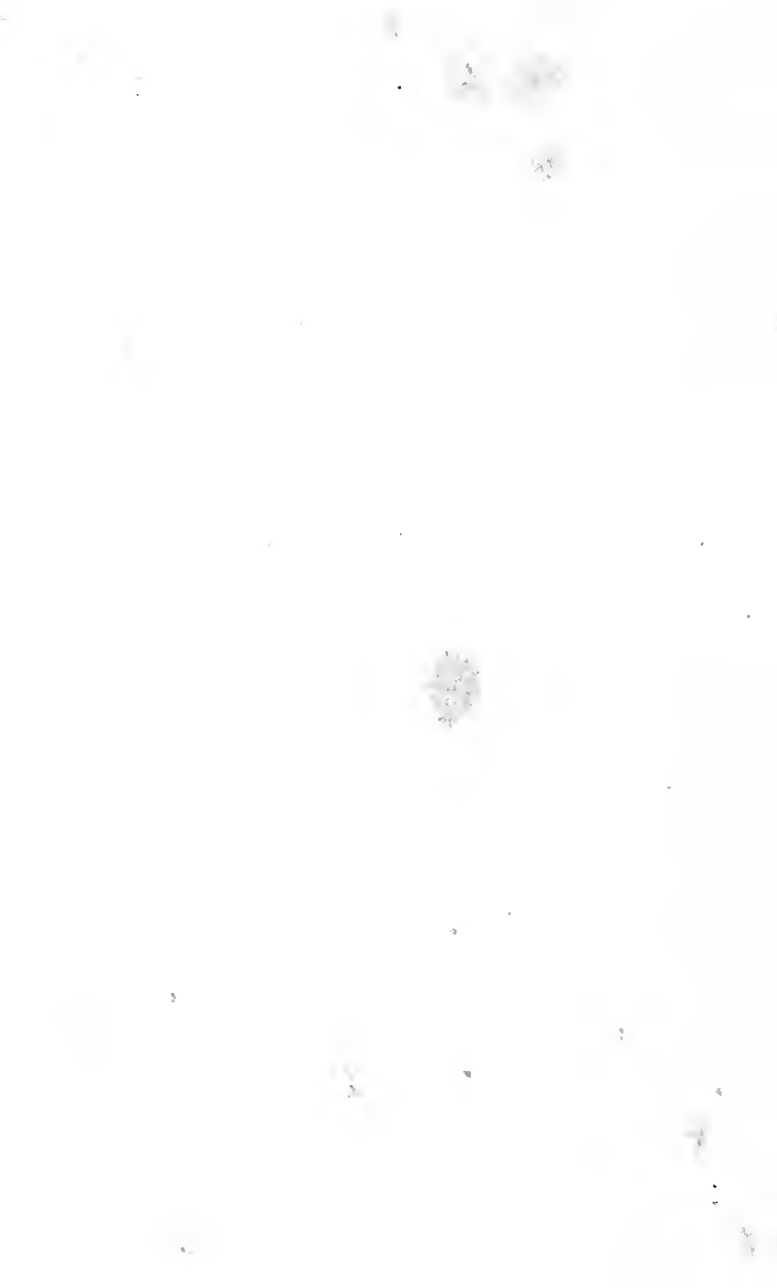
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